THE STRETELLI CASE

The Stretelli Case

And Other Mystery Stories

By Edgar Wallace

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The Stretelli Case

Detective-Inspector John MacKenzie has retired—the newspapers are filled with stories of his exploits. His immediate chiefs are equally filled with wonder, suspecting many reasons for his premature withdrawal from the services of his country, but never by any chance hitting upon the real cause, which was the unquenchable antagonism between his sense of duty, his sense of justice, and his grim sense of humor.

And this conflict of emotions arose over the Stretelli case, which most crime experts and the majority of people consider as having been rounded off on a certain cold December morning in Nottingham Prison.

In a sense this was true; yet, with the compliments of his Chief in his ears and with the knowledge that there was a vacant post for a new superintendent to be filled, duty, justice, and humor battled it out so briskly in his mind that he sat down in his office and wrote his resignation.

In one sense Mackenzie was old-fashioned, and when a card was brought into his office inscribed "Dr. Mona Stretelli, Madrid," he sniffed.

He was prejudiced against women doctors,

though this was the first lady who had ever called upon him professionally.

"Show her in," he said, and wondered exactly what had brought a Spanish lady doctor to Scotland Yard.

She was in the room before his speculations were carried far—a girl of middle height, dark, capable, and even pretty.

"I am very honored to meet you, doctor," he said conventionally, speaking in French. "What can I do for you?"

She smiled faintly at the brusque greeting.

"You can give me ten minutes of your valuable time, Mr. Mackenzie," she said in perfect English. "I have rather an important statement to make."

She handed him a letter bearing the Home Office stamp. It was an introduction from a high official, and Inspector Mackenzie ceased to wonder.

"Do you know Mr. Peter Morstels?" she asked, and he shook his head.

She hesitated.

"In London you must hear . . . rumors about people—in the West End, I mean. Have you ever heard of Margaret Stretelli?"

Mackenzie frowned.

"Of course! I thought the name was familiar. Stretelli! You are related?"

She nodded.

"She was my sister," she said quietly.

"Was—she's not dead?"

The girl nodded again, and he saw that her eyes were wet.

When Margaret Stretelli disappeared from London, nobody at police headquarters was either relieved or sorry, but the event did not pass unnoticed. Margaret belonged to the bobbed-hair set that had its meeting-place in a Soho restaurant. She was known to be an associate of questionable people; there was talk of cocaine traffic in which she played an exciting but unprofitable part; there was one wild party into which the police had intruded, and a minor court case where she had figured, a little vulgarly, as the driver of a car which had charged a lamp-post.

Police headquarters was mildly interested in her vagaries, knew her to be well off in the matter of money, and when she was no longer seen at her haunts they made discreet inquiries, to discover that she had married a gentleman farmer in the Midlands, and had run away from him a very few weeks after the marriage, and had gone to New York.

A very uninteresting and commonplace story, hardly worthy the attention of Scotland Yard's recording angel, yet, since all crime has its basis in the commonplace, the circumstances were duly noted and filed.

"Perhaps I had better tell you our story," she began. "My father was a doctor of Madrid, and on his death he left five million pesetas between his two daughters, myself and Margaret. I had taken up my father's profession, the pro-

fession of medicine, and was in my third year when he died.

"Poor Margaret loved life—as she understood it. Three months after father's death, she left Madrid for Paris, ostensibly to study music. From Paris she went to London, and, so far as I can learn, she got into a very undesirable set. How she came to meet Mr. Morstels, I have never been able to discover. It is certain that she had wasted a great deal of money when she came under his influence. He proposed to her and they were married at Marylebone Registry Office, and she left with him for his home at Little Saffron.

"She was seen there by some of the villagers, and, so far as can be ascertained, lived with him for three weeks. How much longer she was a resident is not known. It may have been three months, it may have been no longer than a month. But, when she disappeared, the story that she had run away from her husband was accepted as true by the villagers of Avignon, who had got quite used to the unfortunate character of Mr. Morstels' marriages."

"He had been married before?" asked Mackenzie.

"Twice," said the girl; "and each time his wife ran away and was divorced by him. Mr. Mackenzie, I am satisfied that my sister has been murdered!"

Mackenzie sat up in his chair.

"Murdered? My dear young lady, that sort of thing does not happen——"

He stopped suddenly, realizing that this was the type of crime that did happen.

"Possibly his story is true, and your sister ran away," he suggested.

She shook her head.

"That is impossible. Had she run away she would have come to me. We were always the best of friends, and though she was wilful and headstrong, she never got into a strait when she did not ask me to get her out of it."

"Have you seen Mr. Morstels?" asked Mackenzie.

"I have seen him: I saw him yesterday for the first time," she said, "and the sight of him convinces me that my sister has been murdered."

"That's rather a serious statement to make, but I realize that you would not advance such a theory unless you had good grounds," said Mackenzie, with a smile. "After all, doctors as a profession are not easily influenced or given to making rash statements, are you?"

She shook her head.

"I am not, certainly," she said, rising and walking up and down the room, her voice rising agitatedly. "Forgive me, Mr. Mackenzie, but I am so convinced that poor Margaret is dead that, if she walked into the room at this moment, I know that I should be suffering from an illusion."

"But why do you feel this?" Mackenzie persisted. "Beyond the fact that Mr. Morstels seems to be, by your account, a much married

man, nothing is known against him."

"I have been making inquiries," she said. "The local police speak well of him, but I think that I can furnish you with some details which may be of interest. Before Margaret left London, she drew from the bank the sum of six thousand five hundred pounds. Where is that money?"

"Did you ask him?"

"I asked him, and he said that one of his greatest misfortunes was that the lady, when she left him, had taken with her not only her own money but some of his. He had the audacity to ask me if I was prepared to refund it."

Mackenzie sat hunched up at his desk, his chin in his hand, a heavy frown on his face.

"It grows more and more like a conventional murder story," he said. "I hope for your sake, Miss Stretelli, that you are mistaken. I will see Mr. Morstels."

On a wintry morning, when the frost showed whitely on the bare branches in Mr. Peter Morstels' orchard, Detective-Inspector Mackenzie made his leisurely way from the little railway station, a pipe between the teeth, the furled umbrella, without which he never moved, under his arm.

In sight of Hill Cottage he stopped and carefully inspected the rambling house with the ugly concrete extension that had recently been completed. It stood on the slope of a hill, a picturesque dwelling, owing something of its charm to distance.

Five minutes later he was inspecting the building nearer at hand, and he was not impressed. The man who answered his knock was unusually tall and broad, a veritable giant of a man. His thin hair was flaxen, his big face ruddy with the glow of health. Standing square in the doorway, he looked down upon the detective with a scowl of suspicion.

"Good morning, Mr. Morstels. I am Inspector Mackenzie from Scotland Yard."

Not a muscle of the big man's face moved. No flicker of lid hid for a second the pale blue of the saucer eyes.

"Glad to see you, officer. Come in."

He led the way to a stone-floored kitchen, low-ceilinged and clean.

"I'm wondering if Miss Stretelli sent you? She did, eh? I thought it was likely. If I haven't had enough trouble with her sister without her coming to me with fantastic stories about my wife!"

"Where is your wife?" asked Mackenzie bluntly.

"In America somewhere—she never told me the town she was going to, naturally. I've got her letter upstairs."

He was gone a few minutes, returning with a sheet of gray paper. It bore no address.

"I am leaving you because I cannot endure the quietness of the country. I am writing this on board the *Teuronic*. Please divorce me. I am not traveling in my own name."

Mackenzie turned the letter over in his hand.

"Why didn't she use ship's stationery?" he asked pleasantly. "A woman in a hurry to get away does not usually unpack her trunks in order to get stationery that is available in the saloon. I suppose you traced her through the passenger list—oh, of course, you couldn't! She was traveling in another name. I wonder how she got over the passport difficulty?"

He said all this musingly, watching the man before him, but if he expected to irritate Peter Morstels into an indiscreet statement, he was to be disappointed.

"That was her business," said the other calmly. "She did not take me into her confidence. Her sister thinks I have killed her!" He laughed quietly. "Fortunately, I was alone when she called the other day. A nice story would have gone through the village if my servant had heard her!"

His eyes never left the detective's face as he spoke.

"I suppose she told you something of the sort?" he queried. "If she did, you're at liberty to search the house, dig up the ground, and pull the place to pieces. I can say no fairer than that. The only things I have of hers are some clothing she did not take away. Would you care to see it?"

Mackenzie followed him up the stairs to the big bedroom at the front of the house. In a wardrobe closet he found a fur coat, two or

three dresses, and half a dozen pairs of shoes. These latter he examined carefully, one by one, and found a pair that had not been worn. Mackenzie, who knew something of women, drew his own conclusions.

An examination of the garden and the grounds brought him no nearer to a solution of the girl's disappearance.

"What are you building there?" he asked, pointing to the half-finished concrete annex.

The man smiled slowly.

"That was to have been a new bathroom for my lady! Hill Cottage wasn't good enough for her. I was building this place as a sitting-room for myself, but she made me remodel it for her use. I'm a poor man, Mr. Mackenzie, but I would have spent my last sou for that woman! She had plenty of money—thousands—but not a penny did she give me. Not that I wanted it."

Mackenize drew a long breath.

"You've been rather unfortunate in your matrimonial affairs," he said, and had nothing but a grunted agreement.

The detective went back to town that morning in a thoughtful mood. He found Mona Stretelli waiting for him in his office.

"I see by your face that you have learned nothing," she said.

"You must be a thought reader," he smiled. "The only thing I am satisfied about, and this is unofficial, is that Morstels is a liar. He may be a murderer, too, but—there is a 'but'!"

"Do you think that, if you had authority to search, you should find anything?"

Mackenzie shook his head.

"I don't think so," he replied regretfully. "This man is more than an ordinary criminal. If he has killed these unfortunate women——"

He saw her turn white and stagger, and ran to her assistance.

"It is nothing," she said, and suddenly her black brows met, and there came a fire in her eyes that startled him. "I swear to you," she said, in a low, vehement tone, "that this man shall not escape! He shall suffer for his crimes——"

Suddenly she stopped, and her compressed lips gave some indication of the self-restraint she was exercising. She held out her hand.

"I shall not see you again," she said.

That afternoon, Mackenzie reported to his Chief, and put the matter plainly to him. The Commissioner was not hopeful.

"I am afraid we can do nothing. Naturally, this unfortunate Spanish girl is excited by the loss of her sister, but these disappearances are very common, particularly when the person who disappears is—let us say Bohemian. She will very likely turn up at Monte Carlo next season."

Mackenzie disagreed.

He did not see Mona Stretelli for a fortnight, though, to his surprise, he read about her. There had been a sale of some old jewelry, the property of a deceased Marquis, and she had pur-

chased a famous paste ring, which had been the property of Marie Antoinette, for £200. A picture of the ring appeared in some of the London newspapers, the editors being possibly attracted by the quaint and even bizarre setting. It was such a ring as no woman could wear—it was enormously large—and he was puzzled that she had overcome her distress so that she could indulge in a frivolity of this kind. Then, about a week later, a most amazing thing happened. She went to Scotland Yard unannounced one evening, and he expected some news, but certainly not the news she gave him.

"Mr. Mackenzie," she said, "I have been very ungenerous in reference to Mr. Morstels, and I am perfectly satisfied that my suspicions were ill-founded."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Have you seen him?" he asked.

She nodded; there was a flush in her cheek and her voice was unsteady as she answered him.

"I am going to be married to Mr. Morstels this week."

He looked at her, speechless with astonishment.

"Married?" he gasped. "But, knowing what you do——"

"I am afraid we were both very prejudiced against Peter," she said calmly. "I have found him a most charming and fascinating man."

"I should imagine you have," said Mackenzie

grimly. "But do you realize what you are doing?"

She nodded.

"And you're really going to marry him?"

"Yes," she replied. "I am marrying him when—when his divorce proceedings are through. I am staying with him for a week. His aunt is coming to chaperon me. I told you I would not see you again," she said, with a half-smile, "but this time I mean it!"

With a curt farewell she was gone. As she was leaving the room, the bag she was carrying under her arm slipped and fell. She picked it up hurriedly and passed out of the room, but in falling the bag had opened and a long moire silk purse had fallen out. He did not notice it until she had gone. Picking it up, he opened the purse, thinking to find a card bearing her Paris address. All there was in the purse was an oblong receipt form which interested him considerably.

A few seconds later she was announced again. Evidently the girl had discovered her loss.

"I know what you have come for," said Mackenzie, looking at her flushed face. "I found it on the floor a few seconds ago."

"Thank you," she said, a little breathlessly, and without another word she turned and went away.

The next morning he received a wire telling him she was leaving for the country. Mackenzie thought many things—but mostly his mind was

occupied by one problem: what value would the homicidal Peter Morstels place upon the eccentric ring of Marie Antoinette? The reason for the purchase of the ring was now clear.

On the second morning after the departure of the girl, he strolled down to Waterloo Station to see the passengers off and to watch the departure of the boat-train for Southampton. There was a very big trans-Atlantic passenger list, and so many people were crossing to America that the train was run in two sections.

"Queer how these Americans travel," said the station inspector, recognizing him. "Look at that old lady." He pointed to a bent figure in deep mourning, walking painfully along the platform with the aid of two sticks. "At her time of life to be risking a sea voyage!"

"Extraordinary," agreed Mackenzie.

When he returned to the house that afternoon he found a letter waiting for him. The envelope was soiled and muddy, the address was in pencil. Inside was a visiting-card—Mona Stretelli's—and scrawled on its face were the words: "For God's sake come to me!"

Mackenzie carried the news to his Chief, and from that moment he was out of the case, though he had credit for all that followed.

"But, my dear fellow, you must take the case!" insisted his Chief, but Mac was adamant, and to Inspector Jordan belongs all the immediate credit for the discoveries.

It was near midnight when Jordan arrived

at the farm, and this time he went armed with authority, for he had seen his Chief and had impressed him with the seriousness of the possibilities.

Peter Morstels, half dressed, opened the door himself, and turned a little pale when he saw his visitor.

"Where is Mona Stretelli?" asked Jordan curtly.

"She has left," said Peter. "She left me the night she arrived here. My aunt could not come, and she would not stay without a chaperon."

"You're lying," said the detective shortly, "and I am going to place you under arrest while I make a search of the house."

The search of the house revealed nothing, but in the morning Jordan questioned the villagers, and produced evidence which made the case against Morstels look black. Two men who, returning from a neighboring village, had passed by a short cut within a quarter of a mile of the house, had heard a woman's sharp scream at nine o'clock that night. It came from the direction of Hill Cottage. No further sound was heard, and apparently the villagers took little notice of the occurrence. When questioned by the detective, Morstels admitted that, for some unaccountable reason, which he had put down to hysteria, Mona Stretelli had started screaming.

"She was like a lunatic," he protested. "Must I be arrested because a woman screams? I gave

her an hour to calm down, then I went to her room and knocked at her door, but there was no answer. I opened it, and she was gone—possibly through a window, for it is a window from which she could drop easily to the ground."

"That story isn't quite good enough," said Jordan. "I am going to remove you to the police station, pending an examination of the ground."

The whole of the estate, such as was not covered by trees, was very carefully probed and dug, and on the third day of the investigation the big discovery was made. Under about four feet of earth was found a heap of charred bones; but, most damning of all, the ring of Marie Antoinette!

Jordan came back to London and woke Mackenzie with the news.

"He evidently disposed of the bodies by burning," he said exultantly. "There is a huge fireplace in the kitchen, and the bodies could be burnt without detection. We have our pathologist, who swears that the bones are human."

"They are not necessarily the bones of Mona Stretelli," said Mackenzie warningly.

"But there is the ring!" he said in triumph. "That is sufficient!"

Throughout the trial that followed, Morstels preserved a sangfroid which was remarkable. The only time he broke down was when the death sentence was pronounced, and then it was only for a few moments.

On the morning before his execution, Mackenzie went to Nottingham Prison to see him, at the condemned man's request. He was smoking a cigarette and chatting with one of the warders, and he greeted the detective with a little nod.

"You brought me bad luck, Mackenzie, but I'm going to tell you something. I did kill several women—three or four, I forget," he said, with a shrug of indifference. "They are all in concrete, the foundations of my new house," he chuckled. "But Mona Stretelli I did not kill—that I swear. It is a bit tough on me, Mac, that I'm to swing for a murder which I did not commit!"

He brooded for a minute, then:

"I should like to see this girl Stretelli and congratulate her."

Mackenzie did not reply until he wrote his resignation. He had seen in Mona Stretelli's purse a receipt from a Steamship Company for her passage. To make doubly sure, he had gone to Waterloo and recognized her, though she was well disguised, as she boarded the train.

The night after she was supposed to have been murdered, she was on the broad Atlantic, bound for a new home, a new land, and a new life, leaving behind her, in a hole which she herself had dug, the calcined bones which she had purchased from an anatomical establishment, and the ring which was to bring Morstels to the scaffold.

And Mackenzie knew it, and let a man hang for a crime he had not committed. His conscience and his sense of justice were appeased. His sense of humor was entirely satisfied.

The Looker and the Leaper

Foley, the smoke-room oracle, has so often bored not only the members of the club, but a much wider circle of victims, by his views on heredity and the functions of the *hormones*—for he has a fluent pen and an entrée to the columns of a certain newspaper that shall be nameless—that one is averse to recalling his frayed theories.

He is the type of scientist who takes a correspondence course in such things as mnemonics, motor engineering, criminology, wireless telegraphy, and character-building. He paid nothing for the *hormones,* having found them in an English newspaper report of Professor Parrott's (is it the name?) lecture.

Hormones are the little *X's* in your circulatory system which inflict upon an unsuspecting and innocent baby such calamities as his uncle's nose, his father's temper, and Cousin Minnie's unwholesome craving for Chopin and bobbed hair. The big fellows in the medical world hesitate to assign the exact function of the *hormones* or even to admit their existence.

Foley, on the contrary, is prepared to supply thumb-nail sketches and specifications. When

you go to the writing-table in the "Silence" room, and find it littered with expensive stationery, more or less covered with scrawly-wags, it is safe betting that Foley has been introducing his new friend to some wretched member whom he has inveigled into an indiscreet interest.

But *Hormones* apart, there is one theory of evolution to which Foley has clung most tenaciously. And it is that the ultra-clever father has a fool for a son.

Whether it works the other way round he does not say. I should think not, for Foley senior is in his eightieth year, believes in spiritualism, and speculates on margins.

Foley advanced his theory in relation to Dick Magnus.

John Seymour Magnus, his father, is popularly supposed to be in heaven, because of the many good qualities and characteristics recorded on the memorial tablet in St. Mary's Church. Thus: He was a Good Father, a Loving Husband and a Faithful Friend, and performed Many Charitable Deeds in This City.

There is nothing on the memorial tablet about his Successful Promotions or Real Estate Acquisitions. He was bracketed first as the keenest business man of his day. A shrewd, cunning general of commerce, who worked out his plans to the minutest detail, he ran his schemes to a time-table and was seldom late. All other men (except one) would comprehend the beginning and fruition of their schemes within the space

of months. John Seymour Magnus saw the culmination of his secret politics three years ahead.

There was one other, a rival, who had the same crafty qualities. Carl Martingale was his contemporary, and it is an important circumstance that he supplied, in his son, a complete refutation of all Foley's theories. Carl and John died within twelve days of one another, and both their great businesses went to only sons.

Dick took over the old man's chair, and was so oppressed by his uncongenial surroundings that he sold it for a ridiculous figure to Steven Martingale. The two were friends, so the sale was effected over a luncheon for which Dick paid.

Steven had arranged the lunch weeks ahead, had decided upon the course of conversation which would lead up to the question of sale, and had prepared his reply when Dick was manœuvered into offering the property. For Steven was his parent, and worse. Old Carl was a self-made boor, with no refined qualities. Steven had the appearance and speech of a gentleman and shared certain views on life with the anthropoid ape.

Ugly stories floated around, and once old Jennifer came into the club in a condition bordering on hysteria and drank himself maudlin. He had hoped to bag Steven for the family, and had allowed his pretty daughter Fay a very free hand.

Too free, it seems.

Nothing happened which in any way discommoded Steven. The old fellow owed him an immense amount of money, and Steven knew to a penny the exact strength of these financial leg-irons.

He was a strikingly handsome fellow, the type the shop-girls rave about—dark, tall, broad of shoulder and lean of flank, an athlete and something of a wit. A greater contrast to Dick could not be imagined, for Dick was thinnish and small, fair haired, rather short-sighted (Steven's flashing eye and long lashes were features that fascinated) and languid.

But he did not develop his left-handedness until after he was married.

Both Dick and Steven courted Thelma Corbett, and never a day passed but that their cars were parked in the vicinity of the Corbett *ménage*. Corbett being on the danger-zone of bankruptcy was indifferent as to which of the two men succeeded in their quest, and Thelma was in a like case.

She was one of those pretty slender creatures whom, meeting, leave you with a vague unrest of mind. Where had you met her before? Then you realized (as I realized) that she was the ideal toward which all the line artists who ever drew pretty women were everlastingly striving. She was cold and sweet, independent and helpless, clever and vapid; you were never quite certain which was the real girl and which was the varnish and the finishing-school.

To everybody's surprise, she married Dick.

Steven had willed it, of course. He half admitted as much one night between acts when we were smoking in the lobby of the Auditorium. Dick had at that time been married for the best part of a year and was childishly happy.

"I can't understand how Dick came to cut you out, Steven," I said. He was feeling pretty good toward me just about then, for I had pulled him through a sharp attack of *grippe*.

He laughed, that teasing little laugh of his.

"I thought it best," he said, a statement which could be taken two ways. That he was not exposing his modesty or displaying the least unselfishness, he went on to explain:

"She was too young, too placid. Some women are like that. The men who marry them never wake them up. Some go through life with their hearts asleep and die in the belief that they have been happy. They have lived without 'struggle,' and only 'struggle' can light the fire which produces the perfect woman. I figured it that way."

I was silent.

"I figured it that way"—a favorite expression of his—explained in a phrase the inexplicable.

"That is why you find the most unlikely women running away with the most impossible men," he went on; "the heavens are filled with the woes of perfect husbands and the courts shudder with their lamentations. They are bewildered, stunned, outraged. They have showered their wealth and affection upon a delicate

lady, and in return she has fled with a snub-nosed chauffeur whose vocabulary is limited to twelve hundred words and whose worldly possessions are nil."

I said nothing, and soon after the bell rang and we went back to our seats. He drove me home that night and came up to my den for a drink, and I reopened the subject of Dick and his wife.

"Dick is one of Nature's waste products," he said. "He has neither initiative nor objective in life. How could old Magnus breed such a son? He was the cleverest, shrewdest old devil in the City. Dick is just pap and putty—a good fellow and a useful fellow for holding my lady's wool or carrying my lady's Chow, but——"

He shook his head.

"No 'struggle' there, Steve?" I asked. "Foley's theory works out in this case."

"Foley is a fool," smiled Steven. "What about me? Aren't I my father's son?"

I admitted that.

"No, Dick lives from breakfast to supper, and could no more work out a scheme as his father did than I could knit a necktie."

"And there is no 'struggle' in the establishment?" I repeated, and he nodded gravely.

"There is no 'struggle,'" he said, and although he never said the words I felt him saying "as yet."

Steven became a frequent visitor at the Magnus' house—Dick told me this himself.

"He's an amusing person," he said—I met

him in the Park, and he stopped his car to talk—"and I can't help feeling that life is a little dull for Thelma."

It was much duller for people who were brought much into contact with Thelma, but I did not say so. She was the kind of hostess who wanted entertaining.

Everybody loved Dick in those days, and he was welcomed wherever he went. Later, when he passed through that remarkably awkward stage, a stage which we usually associate with extreme adolescence, he was not so popular, and I was a little bit worried about him. It grieved me to see a man with all the money in the world making a playtime of life, because people who live for play can find their only recreation in work, and he never expressed the slightest desire to engage himself in the pursuit which had built up his father's colossal fortune. He rode well, he shot well, he played a good game of golf, and it was a case of "Let's get Dick" for a fourth at bridge.

"The fact is," said Dick, when I tackled him one day, "heavy thinking bores me. Maybe if I had to, I would. Sometimes I feel that I have a flash of my father's genius, but I usually work out that moment of inspiration in a game of solitaire."

One afternoon he took me home to tea, arriving a little earlier than usual. He was evidently surprised to find Steve's car drawn up near the house. He should have been more surprised when he walked through the French windows

opening from the lawn to the drawing-room, and found Steve and Thelma side by side on a settee examining Medici prints. It may have been necessary for the proper study of Art that Steve's hand should be upon the girl's shoulder. Evidently she did not think so, for she tried to disengage herself, but Steve, much more experienced in the ways of the world, kept his hand in position and looked up with a smile. As for me, I felt *de trop*.

"Hello, people!" said Dick, glaring benignly into the flushed face of the girl, "do my eyes behold a scandal in process of evolution? Or have I interrupted an exposition on the art of Michael Angelo?"

Steve rose with a laugh.

"I brought Thelma some pictures," he said, "they're a new lot just published; they are rather fine, don't you think?"

Dick looked at the pictures and, having no artistic soul, said that they struck him as a little old-fashioned, and I saw the girl's lips curl in disdain of her husband, and felt a trifle sad.

Another time (I have learnt since) Dick found them lunching together at Madarino's, a curious circumstance in view of the fact that she had said she was going to spend the day with her mother.

Then one afternoon Dick went home and sounded his motor-horn loudly as he swept up the drive, and discovered his wife at one end of the drawing-room and Steve at the other, and they were discussing Theosophy loudly.

After tea Dick linked his arm in Steve's and took him into the grounds.

"Steve, old boy," he said affectionately, "I don't think I should come and see Thelma unless somebody else is here, old man."

"Why in Heaven's name shouldn't I?" asked Steve. "What rubbish you talk, Dick! Why, I've known Thelma as long as I've known you."

Dick scratched his chin.

"Yes, that seems a sound kind of argument," he said. "Still, I wouldn't if I were you. You know, servants and people of that kind talk."

But Steve smacked him on the back and told him not to be a goomp, and Thelma was so nice that evening that, when during a week-end Dick surprised his wife and Steve one morning walking with linked hands along an unfrequented path through the woods, he did no more than give them a cheery greeting, and passed on with a grin.

It was about this time that Dick started on his maladroit career. He became careless in his dress, could not move without knocking things over, went altogether wrong in his bridge, so that you could always tell which was Dick's score by a glance at the block. There was usually a monument of hundreds, two hundreds, and five hundreds erected above the line on the debit side, and when men cut him as a partner they groaned openly and frankly.

Harry Wallstein, who is a lunatic collector, gave him a rare Ming vase to examine, and Dick

dropped it, smashing the delicate china into a hundred pieces. Of course he insisted upon paying the loss, but he could not soothe Harry's anguished soul. He had a trick too, when he was taking tea with some of his women friends, of turning quickly in a drawing-room and sweeping all the cups on to the floor. In the street he escaped death by miracles. Once he stood in the center of a crowded thoroughfare at the rush hour to admire the amethystine skies. A motor lorry and two taxicabs piled themselves up on the sidewalk in consequence, for it had been raining and the roads were slippery.

Dick footed the bill for the damage and went on his awkward way. It is extraordinary how quickly a man acquires a reputation for eccentricity. People forgot the unoffending Dick that used to be, and knew only the dangerous fool who was. When he called on Mrs. Tolmarsh, whose collection of Venetian glass has no equal in the country, the butler was instructed never to leave his side, to guide him in and out of the drawing-room, and under no circumstances to allow him to handle the specimens which Mrs. Tolmarsh invariably handed round for the admiration of her guests. Nevertheless he managed to crash a sixteenth-century vase and a decanter which had been made specially for Fillipo, Tyrant of Milan, and was adorned with his viperish crest.

And in the meantime Steven gave up his practice of calling three times a week on Mrs. Magnus and called every day.

Dick did not seem to mind, although he took to returning home earlier than had been his practice. I might have warned Dick. I preferred, however, to say a few words to Steven, and I got him alone in a corner of the library and I did not mince my words.

"I shall not moralize, Steven," I said, "for that is not my way. You have your own code and your own peculiar ideas concerning women, and so far you've got away with it. I do not doubt that you will get away with this matter because Dick seems to be drifting down the stream towards imbecility—but there are, thank Heaven, a few decent people in this town, and if you betray Dick you are going to have a pretty thin time. I won't commit the banality of asking you to look before you leap, because I know you're a pretty good looker!"

"Leaper!" he corrected. "No person who looks very carefully leaps at all. The world is divided into those two classes—lookers and leapers. Anyway, I am not very greatly concerned by what people think of me. If I were, I should have entered a monastery a long time ago. You've been straight with me, Doctor, and I'm going to be straight with you. My affairs are my affairs and concern nobody else. I shall do just as I think, and take a line which brings me the greatest satisfaction."

"Whosoever is hurt?" I asked.

"Whosoever is hurt," he said, and meant it. "I know just what is coming to me. I have figured it out."

There was no more to be said. To approach Dick was a much more delicate matter, for he was impervious to hints.

A week after I had talked to Steven I met Hariboy, who is a banker of standing and the president of my golf club. I met him professionally, for I had been called into his house to perform a minor operation on one of his children, and I was cleaning up in his dressing-room when he strolled in, and after some talk about the child he said:

"Steven Martingale is going away."

"Going away?" I repeated. "How do you know?"

"I know he has taken steamship accommodations for Bermuda. My secretary and his secretary are apparently friends, and she told my girl that Steven is doing a lot of rush work, and that he is leaving for a long holiday on the 18th."

"Do you know by what line?" I asked, and he told me.

Luckily the manager of the shipping office was a patient of mine, and I made it my business to call on him that afternoon.

"Yes, the ship leaves on the 18th," he said, "but I haven't Mr. Martingale on my passenger list."

We went through it together, and I traced my finger down the cabin numbers and their occupants.

"Who is this in No. 7 suite?" I asked.

He put on his glasses and looked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Smith. I don't know who they are. It's not an uncommon name," he added humorously.

So that was that!

I do not think I should have moved any further in the matter if I had had the slightest degree of faith in Steven's honesty. But Steven was not a marrying man. He had once told me that under no circumstances would he think of binding his life with that of any woman, and had expounded his philosophy with that cold-blooded logic of his, which left me in no doubt at all that whatever fine promises he might make to Thelma Magnus, only one end of that adventure was inevitable.

I sought Dick all over the town, and ran him to earth in the first place I should have looked —the card-room of Proctor's Club. I entered the room in time to hear the peroration of a violent address on idiocy delivered by Dick's late partner. His opponents were too busy adding up the score to take any interest in the proceeding.

Dick sat back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, a little smile on his thin face.

"Fortunes of war, old top," he murmured from time to time.

"Fortunes of war be——" roared Staines, who was his victim. "You go four spades on the queen, knave to five, and not another trick in your hand . . .!"

"Fortunes of war, old top," said Dick again, paid his opponents and rose, upsetting the table

and scattering the cards in all directions. "Awfully sorry," he murmured; "really awfully sorry!"

That "awfully sorry" of his came mechanically now.

"Now, Dick," said I, when I'd got him into my car, "you're coming straight home with me, and I'm going to talk to you like an uncle."

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "Not about Thelma?"

I was astounded, and I suppose looked my astonishment.

"Everybody talks to me about Thelma," said Dick calmly. "She's a dear, good girl, and as honest as they make 'em. I'm not a very amusing chap, you know, Doctor," he said mournfully, "and Steven is the kind of fellow who can keep a room in roars of laughter."

"But, my dear, good man," I said impatiently, "don't you realize that a man of Steven's character does not call daily on your wife to tell her funny stories?"

"I don't know," said Dick vaguely. "Thelma seems to like him, and I've really no grudge against old Steve. He's a leaper too," he said, with a quick, sidelong glance at me, "and that makes him ever so much more interesting to the women."

He chuckled at my astonishment.

"He was telling us the other night about that amusing conversation he had with you."

"He did not tell you the whole of the conver-

sation, I'll swear," said I dryly, but Dick showed no curiosity.

"Old Steven is a good fellow," he repeated. "I like him, and I tell everybody who comes to me with stories about him and Thelma that he is my very best friend."

I groaned in the spirit.

"Then," said I in despair, "it is useless telling you that Steven has booked two berths by the steamer which leaves on the 18th for Bermuda."

He nodded.

"I know; he is taking his aunt," he said. "I got the same yarn from Chalmers, and I asked Steven, and he told me, yes, he was going away——"

"In the name of Smith?" I asked pointedly.

"In the name of Smith," repeated Dick gravely. "After all, he's a big power in the financial world, Doctor, and it is not good business for him to advertise his comings and goings."

After that there was no more to be said.

"We're having a little party on the 17th at the house. I wish you would come along," said Dick before I left him. "I've particularly asked Steve to come. It will be a send-off for him, though of course nobody must know that he is going abroad."

The dear, simple fool said this so solemnly that I could have kicked him. What could I do? I had a talk with Chalmers, who is as fond of Dick as I am, and he could offer no advice.

"It's hopeless," he said, "and the queer thing is that Dick has arranged to go out of town on the night of the 17th. So we can't even drag him to the ship to confront this swine!"

"Do you think he'll marry her?" I asked after a long pause in the conversation.

"Marry her!" scoffed Chalmers. "Did he marry Fay Jennifer? Did he marry that unhappy girl Steele? Marry her!"

It was a big party which Dick gave. His house lay about twenty miles out of town and is situated in the most gorgeous country. It was a hot autumn day, with a cloudless sky and a warm gentle breeze, the kind of day that tempts even the most confirmed of city birds into the open country.

I do not think it was wholly the salubrious weather that was responsible for the big attendance. Half the people, and all the women who were present, knew that on the following day Steven Martingale was leaving for Bermuda, and that Thelma would accompany him.

I saw the girl as soon as I arrived, and noted the bright eyes, the flushed cheek, and the atmosphere of hectic excitement in which she moved. She was a little tremulous, somewhat incoherent, just a thought shrill.

All Dick's parties were amusing and just a little unconventional. For example, in addition to the band and the troupe of *al fresco* performers and Grecian dancers, he usually had some sort of competition for handsome prizes, and the young people, particularly, looked for-

ward to these functions with the greatest enjoyment. On this occasion there was a revolver-shooting competition for ladies and gentlemen, the prize for the women being a diamond bangle, and for the men a gold cigarette case.

Most men imagine themselves to be proficient in the arts which they do not practice, and nine out of ten who have never handled a gun boast of their marksmanship.

Dick sought me out and took me into the house and upstairs to his own snuggery.

"Doctor," said he, as he dropped into an easy-chair and reached for his cigarettes, "spare a minute to enlighten me. What was the Crauford smash? I only heard a hint of it last night, and I'm told that dad was positively wonderful."

It was queer he had never heard of Ralph Crauford and his fall. Old Man Magnus and he were bitter enemies, and whereas Crauford must nag and splutter from day to day, Magnus was prepared to wait. As usual he laid his plans ahead, and one morning failed to turn up at his office. The rumor spread that he was ill, and there was suport for the story, because you could never pass his house without seeing a doctor's waiting car. It was a puzzling case, and I myself was fooled. So was every specialist we brought in. For weeks at a time Magnus would be well, and then he would have a collapse and be absent from his office for days.

And all the time the Crauford crowd were waiting to jump in and smash two of the stocks

he carried. We had advised a trip abroad, but it was not till the end of a year of these relapses and recoveries that he consented. He went to Palermo in Sicily, and after a month it was announced that he had died. Then the fun started. Crauford jumped into the market with a hammer in each hand, figuratively speaking. Tyne River Silver fell from 72 to 31, and all the time the executors of the estate were chasing one another to discover their authority to act. This went on for three days and then the blow fell. Old Man Magnus appeared on 'Change, looking a trifle stouter, a little browner, and infinitely cheerful.

Crauford had "sold over." It cost him his bank balance, his town house, and his country estate plus his wife's jewelry to get square with Magnus.

Dick listened to the story, his eyes beaming, interrupting me now and again with a chuckle of sheer joy.

"Wonderful old dad!" he said at the end; "wonderful old boy! And he was foxing all the time. Kidding 'em along! The art of it, the consummate art of it! Specialists and sea voyages and bulletins every hour!"

He stood up abruptly and threw away his cigarette.

"Let's go and see the women shoot," he said.

There was the usual fooling amongst the girls when their end of the competition started. In spite of their "Which-end-shall-I-hold-it?" and their mock terror, they shot remarkably well.

I had caught a glimpse of Steven, a silent, watchful, slightly amused man, who most conspicuously avoided Thelma, but came down to the booth and stood behind her when she fired her six shots for the prize. Incidentally not one bullet touched the target, and the wobbling of her pistol was pitiful.

Steven's shooting was beautiful to watch. Every bullet went home in the center of the target and the prize was assuredly his.

"Now watch me, Steve," said Dick, and at the sight of Dick with a gun in his hand even his best friends drew back.

He fired one shot, a bull's-eye, the second shot was a little bit to the left, but nevertheless a bull's-eye, the third shot passed through the hole which the first had made, the fourth and fifth were on the rim of the black center—and then he turned with a smile to Steven.

"My old pistol is much better than the best of the new ones," he said.

He had refused to shoot with the weapons provided, and had brought a long ungainly thing of ancient make; but as he was not a competitor in the strict sense of the word, there had been no protest.

The sixth shot went through the bull and there was a general clapping.

"How's that?" said Dick, twiddling his revolver.

"Fine," said Steven.

"The Looker shoots almost as well as the

Leaper," laughed Dick, and pressed the trigger carelessly.

There was a shot and a scream. Steve balanced himself for a moment, looking at Dick in a kind of awed amazement, and then crumpled up and fell.

As for Dick he stood, the smoking revolver still in his hand, frowning down at the prostrate figure.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, but Steven Martingale had passed beyond the consideration of apologies.

He was dead before I could reach him.

. . . . . .

That old-fashioned revolver of Dick's had seven chambers, and people agreed both before and after the inquest that it was the kind of fool thing that Dick would have.

"He ought to have seen there were seven shots when he loaded the infernal weapon," said Chalmers. "Of course, if it was anybody but Dick I should have thought that the whole thing was manœuvred, and that all this awkwardness of his had been carefully acted for twelve months in order to supply an excuse at the inquest and get the 'Accidental Death' verdict. It is the sort of thing that his father would have done. A keen, far-seeing old devil was John Magnus."

I said nothing, for I had seen the look in Dick's eyes when he said "leaper."

At any rate, the shock wakened Dick, for his awkwardness fell away from him like an old

cloak, and Thelma Magnus must have found some qualities in him which she had not suspected, for she struck me as a tolerably happy woman when I met her the other day. But I shall not readily forget that hard glint in Dick's eyes when he spoke the last words which Steven Martingale was destined to hear. I had seen it once before in the eyes of John Seymour Magnus the day he smashed Crauford.

Maybe some of the old man's *hormones* were working. I should like to ask Foley about it.

The Man Who Never Lost

The man in the gray cashmere suit who lolled with his face to the Hotel de Paris was dimly conscious that from one of the balconies he was being particularized. He guessed also that he was in process of being described, but he was hardened to notoriety. He could almost hear the man tell the girl, "That is the celebrated Twyford—the fellow with the system who breaks the bank regularly every week."

Too lazy and somnolent to raise his head even to identify the newcomers to Monte Carlo (as he guessed they were), he stretched his long legs to the sun and settled sideways for greater comfort.

He was forty and grayish. A lean, clean-shaven face; large, regular white teeth that showed readily, for he was easily amused; eyes of steady, unwinking blue, and a gun-metal nerve: these were some of the features and qualities of Aubrey Twyford, The Man Who Never Lost.

"That's Aubrey Twyford," said the envious young man on the balcony. "I wish to Heaven I had half his luck or a tenth."

"Poor Bobby!" said the girl.

Her eyes were sympathetic and kindly, and at the pressure of her hand on his arm he turned.

"Whose luck?"

The middle-aged lady who came through the French windows and joined them on the balcony had no sympathetic quality in her tone, nor was there kindliness in her nod.

"Hello, Bobby," she said, and gave him her cheek; "I heard you had arrived. Who were you talking about?"

He nodded to the square and, shading her eyes, Mrs. Brane took in the lounging figure, from the tips of his white shoes to the crown of his gray hat.

"That's Aubrey Twyford—they call him The Man Who Can't Lose. He comes to Monte Carlo every season from February to May and never leaves the table except as a winner."

"Wonderful man!" said Mrs. Brane dryly. "Are you thinking of emulating his example, Bobby?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, aunt," said Bobby Gardner with a laugh, "I had hopes."

She sniffed.

"I hate gamblers," she said shortly. "He must be a very horrid person." She looked again at the object of their conversation.

Twyford had risen and was walking slowly to meet a short, stout man who had come down the steps of the Hotel de Paris.

"That's Souchet, the big Paris banker. He

is a millionaire, and I wouldn't change places with him for all his money. His daughter ran away with the chauffeur this week, and the poor old gentleman is quite knocked out. He is losing money at the tables, but the beggar can well afford it," said Bobby gloomily.

The girl had gone into the room, and his aunt walked closer to him.

"Why did you come to Monte Carlo, Bobby?"

"Why?" His pretence of surprise was very transparent. "Why, I come here every year."

"But why have you come now?" she asked.

He did not immediately reply nor meet her eye.

"I am getting very tired of this business, Bobby," she said quietly. "You are making a fool of Madge. The girl is simply worried to death. Why don't you propose to her if you are going to?"

He laughed a little bitterly, for Bobby had occasional moments when he was sorry for himself.

"With £400 a year?"

"Bah," she said contemptuously, "as if money made any difference!"

He swung round.

"It makes a lot of difference. Madge is a very rich girl and I am a very poor man. When I can meet her on something like equal terms, I will ask her."

"That is just your vanity," said the elder woman; "man's vanity! It would not worry

you if she were poor and you were rich. You would not regard it as being an undignified thing for her to accept your wealth."

"That is different," he said.

"Only from a man's point of view," said she, and walked back into the sitting-room.

A quarter of an hour later all three passed into the rooms, through the big and terribly serious public room into the ornate *Cercle Privée*. They passed along the roulette tables and came to the crowd about the *trente-et-quarante* players.

"That is the only game he ever plays," said Bobby in an undertone. "Look at him packing it up!"

Before this man in gray, with his expressionless face and his lean, white hands, was a thick pile of thousand-franc notes, and whilst they looked he had added 24,000 to his stock. On the opposite side of the table Bobby saw the dour, bearded face of Souchet the banker. He was not gambling, unless betting in louis can be so described, but five out of every six stakes he played were raked to the croupier.

"Who is Aubrey Twyford?"

"It is a rum story," said Bobby, leading the girl to one of the seats by the wall. "He used to be a professor of psychology, a man who never gambled and took his modest holiday every year in Monte Carlo. People who knew him here twenty years ago say that he never risked as much as a five-franc piece on the table until he discovered his system."

"Has he a system?" she asked.

Bobby nodded.

"The Casino authorities have tried to find what it is. They have had detectives and officials watching him for years. All his coups have been recorded and examined by the best system experts in Europe, but apparently there is no system at all. I have reason to believe they have searched his baggage time and time again to discover some clue which will put them on to his scheme of play, but they found nothing."

"That is very strange, Bobby," she said.

"This is his last season, by the way. He told me yesterday he was chucking it up."

At that moment there was a stir at the table. Souchet and Twyford rose together and walked away, Souchet explaining something with a little smile and The Man Who Never Lost nodding his reply as he pocketed his winnings.

Bobby noticed that he needed two pockets.

"Go on about him," said the girl. "I am fearfully interested."

"About twelve years ago he started playing, and since then he has never looked back. The Casino officials say that he has taken nearly £700,000 from the tables in the past ten years."

She frowned.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked quickly.

"I had an idea," she said. "That is all."

He did not press her. Mr. Aubrey Twyford entertained on a lavish scale. His table, in a

corner of the Café de Paris, was always crowded for dinner, and when Bobby and the girl came in that night they found the usual throng about him.

"I forgot something about Twyford, and I ought to tell you this in justice to him," he said. "He is most awfully good to people who have bad luck. I have known him to go down to see off a man who has gone broke, and to hand him an envelope containing every penny he had lost. You see," said Bobby, with a smile, "one is frightfully communicative at Monte Carlo, and one knows just how the other fellows are doing at the tables. Last season a widow came down with £3000 and lost it in four days. She had come down because she wanted to raise enough money to buy her son a business. It was a mad sort of idea, and Twyford told her so when he got into conversation with her the first day she played, and do you know what he did? He gave her £6000 on the day she left Monte Carlo on the promise she would not gamble again."

"It is incredible," said the girl. "Who is that man next to him?"

"That is young Stanton. His father is a very rich Manchester merchant. He won 200,000 francs this afternoon."

She laughed.

"Is the financial position of anybody in Monte Carlo secret?" she asked.

"Not a bit," laughed Bobby. "I bet you, the

croupiers could tell you your income to within a pound!"

Mr. Stanton had taken a little too much wine. He was loud and talkative.

"I'm going to set 'em alight tonight," he said, with a laugh. "Stand by, everybody, and see me break the bank."

Twyford raised his glass of Vichy water and sipped.

"It is very unlucky to talk about breaking the bank," he said.

"Luck?" said the other. "My dear chap, there isn't any luck in it! One has only to keep one's head——"

"Don't despise luck," said Aubrey. He had a rich mellow voice and spoke slowly and deliberately. "There are three lucky moments in every twenty-four hours, no more. I have studied the subject very carefully. If you get in on the flood-tide of your luck, you can't lose. If you strike any of the other minutes, you cannot win."

"Do you suggest that you only win for three minutes in every twenty-four hours?" scoffed Stanton.

"I am not talking about myself," said the other quietly. "I work on a system, and by my system I cannot lose."

"But if you've got a system," persisted Stanton, gulping down a glass of champagne, "why is it you are not playing all the time? Why, you go for days without making a bet!"

"I shall bet tonight," said Twyford quietly,

"and I shall win and win heavily. I am going to play maximums of twelve thousand francs."

"What we ought to do"—it was Souchet the banker who spoke—"is to follow our friend, but how? He does not play his stake until they start dealing the cards, and then it is too late to follow him."

Twyford smiled.

"That is also part of my system," he said dryly.

The girl leant across the table to Bobby.

"Bobby," she said, "take me back to the Casino when Mr. Twyford goes. I am most anxious to watch his play."

"I'll get you a seat near him," said Bobby. "There are generally one or two sleepers who will give up their seats for a louis."

"Sleepers?" she said, puzzled.

"That isn't the name, I don't think," he said, and explained that there was a class of habitué at the rooms who did nothing but sit on the off-chance that somebody would put down a stake and either walk away or forget to take his winnings. In this case the wily watcher reaches out his hand and rakes in the "sleeper" unless the croupier is extra vigilant and has noticed who staked the money.

Presently the big party broke up, and they strolled through the café across the deserted square. With very little difficulty Bobby secured a seat, two removed from Twyford, for the girl. Immediately opposite her sat the optimistic Stanton, flushed and voluble.

True to his word, Twyford produced a bigger pad of notes than he had taken away in the afternoon. His first stake was for twelve thousand francs, and this he lost. He lost his second stake on black. He staked again on black and won. The girl watched him, fascinated. He dodged from black to red, from red to *couleur*, from *couleur* to *invers*, and five out of every six coups he won. It was enthralling to the girl, possibly because the scene and the setting were so novel and bizarre. She watched the dealer as with amazing dexterity he led out the two lines of cards....

"Rouge perd et couleur."

A clicking of counters against rakes, a flutter of mill notes, and invariably it seemed it was toward Aubrey Twyford that the notes fluttered. She kept note of the colors in a little book which Bobby had provided. There was no method in the run of the cards; they dodged from black to red and from red to black. They ran three times on black before they started zig-zagging from black to red again, and it seemed that everybody at the table was losing—except The Man Who Could Not Lose.

Mr. Stanton was no longer voluble. His big pile had steadily decreased until it was the merest slice. He was losing his nerve. He would put a big stake upon a color, then change his mind and withdraw the greater part of it before the cards were dealt. Once he put down a maximum, hesitated, and took it off, substituting 500 francs on the red. The red won, and he

cursed audibly. Aubrey Twyford, who had had his maximum on the red, smiled.

At eleven o'clock Stanton pushed back his chair and walked round to Twyford.

"They've cleaned me out," he said. "I've lost 300,000 francs. You don't seem to have done so badly."

Twyford smiled.

"Do you want any money?" he asked.

"No, I've finished for the night," said Stanton. "I'll try again in the morning," and walked past him to the bar.

Twyford caught Bobby's eye and nodded.

"Come and drink orangeade," he said. "I am bloated with wealth."

"May I introduce Mr. Twyford?"

The girl looked into the half-smiling eyes of The Man Who Could Not Lose, and saw a whole wealth of humanity and humor in their depths.

"You must drink orangeade, Miss Radley," he said; "everybody does it."

"It sounds very innocuous," she laughed.

"That is just what we want," said he.

"I have been watching your wonderful system, Mr. Twyford," she said.

He chuckled.

"I hope you are not going to tell people how I do it," he said dryly. "Everybody watches my wonderful system and I fear they are as wise as ever, though why they should not understand it from the first, Heaven only knows!"

They sat down in the big, comfortable arm-

chairs with which the buffet was well furnished, and the waiter brought them great tumblers of fragrant orange-juice packed to the brim with cracked ice.

"When I have finished at Monte Carlo, I must write a book about my system," said Twyford.

"And I will be one of your first readers," said the girl. "I am sure I shall come straight to Monte Carlo and win a fortune."

He shook his head, and the smile vanished from his face.

"It requires a heart of iron to work my system," he said. "It is just because I am getting human that I am giving it up."

Bobby went to the bar to get some sandwiches, and the girl turned to the man.

"Mr. Twyford," she said, speaking rapidly in a low voice, "there is something I want to say to you. You are really leaving Monte Carlo for good?"

He nodded.

"And you are not going to work your system again?"

"I am not," he said; "that you may be sure."

"Suppose, Mr. Twyford," she dropped her eyes and fingered the arm of the chair nervously, "suppose somebody offered you a big sum for your system, would you sell it?"

She looked up sharply and saw he was smiling.

"Not for myself," she said, going red, "but

there is somebody—somebody I want to see well off."

"I could not sell it," he said shortly. "I am very, very sorry, and I am really acting in the best interests of the—er—somebody you want to help, but it is impossible."

She bit her lip.

"May I ask you not to tell——?"

He raised his hand to stop her and regarded the returning Bobby with more interest.

Her aunt came into the buffet at that moment and claimed her.

"You ought to be in bed, Madge," she said. "Bobby, why do you keep Madge up so late?"

Then she saw Twyford, and the girl introduced them.

"Have you been teaching them your system, Mr. Twyford?" she asked, with a little smile.

"I teach all Monte Carlo my system," he laughed, "and really the Casino should charge a fee to see me play."

When the women had gone, Twyford turned to Bobby and favored him with a long scrutiny.

"Mr. Gardner," said the elder man, "you aren't playing today."

Bobby shrugged as he sank back in his seat.

"What's the use?" he said. "I fool about with louis, and I neither make money nor lose money. I haven't the nerve to be a gambler, and yet I never have been so tempted to risk every cent I have as I am today.

Twyford sucked at his straw.

"Bad news?" he asked.

"No," said Bobby, "just a realization of what a perfectly useless ass I am!"

"That sort of thing does upset you," said Twyford.

"Do you know what I am going to do?" asked Bobby suddenly, and his fresh young face fired at the thought. "I'm going to have a real old gamble tomorrow. I've got a couple of thousand pounds which I've been putting aside for —for—well, for something, and I'm going to play thousand-franc stakes!"

"You will lose," said Twyford, without hesitation. "Every man who goes out to win big money because he must win big money loses."

"How do you know I must?" said the other sharply.

"I gather from your tone that it is necessary for you to have a lot of money," said Twyford, "and when a man goes out to win that money he loses."

"Always?"

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred," said Twyford; "I think the percentage is a little higher. I kept very complete psychological data during the first few years I was at Monte Carlo, and I think it works out at ninety-nine point four per cent."

Bobby stared at him.

"Then I am going to be the point six per cent. that wins!" he said, and rushed off to see the girl before she retired for the night.

Twyford looked after him with a little smile,

then with a shrug of his shoulders he beckoned the waiter.

Bobby Gardner came down to the vestibule of the hotel the next morning and found Twyford reading a newspaper.

"I was waiting for you," he said. "Do you think you could persuade your ladies to take an auto ride to Grasse?"

"It is awfully kind of you," said Bobby gratefully.

The girl was at first reluctant. She had felt the last night's refusal as a rebuff, but Mrs. Brane wanted to go to Grasse to buy some perfumes, and Madge consented.

It was a much more pleasant ride than she had anticipated. The beauties of the Grand Cornich had been so often described to her that she was prepared to be bored, but the wonder of hill and valley, of narrow mountain roads and dizzy precipices, filled her with amazement and delight.

It was on the journey back, when they had stopped at the Gorge du Loup for afternoon tea, that Aubrey Twyford beckoned her more with a look than a gesture, and she detached herself from Bobby and went to him.

"I have been thinking of what you said last night," he said. "Will you walk a little way up the Gorge with me?"

"About the system?" she said quickly.

He nodded.

"You will sell it?"

"No, I will not sell it," he said, "but I will give it to you. I have decided to leave Monte Carlo tomorrow. All the stories they tell about me are perfectly true. I am a very rich man, and there is no further need for me to gamble. First," he said, turning and facing her, "you must promise me that you will not reveal my secret until after I have left Monte Carlo."

"I promise," she said, "but——"

"There must be no 'buts,'" he said, "not even to Mr. Gardner!"

He saw the colour mount to her cheek, and smiled inwardly, then, taking her arm, he slowly paced the road, and the system of The Man Who Could Not Lose was revealed.

At first she was incredulous. Then she felt a sense of revulsion. Then, as his calm, even tones related the story of his years at Monte Carlo, she recognized that he was speaking as a doctor might speak about his cases, cold-bloodedly and scientifically. At the end of the revelation she held out her hand.

"I am awfully obliged and grateful to you, Mr. Twyford. No, I shan't tell Bobby, and I don't think I shall tell anybody else."

"You will see tonight," he repeated for the second time.

She inclined her head gravely.

They were nearing the party again when he said suddenly:

"Miss Radley, Bobby Gardner is a real good fellow, as clean a specimen of a boy as I have

ever met. I have seen him here year after year, and I have particularly studied him."

She had gone very red, but it was with a smile that she asked:

"Why do you tell me this, Mr. Twyford?"

"It was quite unnecessary," he agreed. "I am sure you have noticed those qualities yourself."

The *trente-et-quarante* table was crowded when Twyford took his seat. Bobby, bright of eye and inordinately cheerful, laid his modest fortune before him, and nodded brightly to Twyford. Then the gambling began. Bobby started with a stake of a thousand francs and won. He increased his stake and won again.

With the exception of three he won twelve successive coups, and suddenly Twyford rose from the table with a little laugh, picked up the remainder of his money, and left the *trente-et-quarante* table for good. He stood watching Bobby, and Bobby was winning heavily until the girl whispered something in his ear when he, too, rose, both hands filled with notes and counters.

Twyford was sitting on a bench smiling, and he jerked his head inviting them, but he was only looking at the girl.

"Come and sit down," he said. "I want to ask you a question." He shook an admonitory forefinger at her, and she laughed. "I am not going to ask you whether you told Bobby Gardner my precious secret," he said.

"I thought you were," she replied in surprise.

"I am merely going to ask you this. Have you become engaged to Bobby since I saw you last?"

She nodded.

"That explains it," said the other.

He rose and shook hands with both of them, and The Man Who Could Not Lose left the gaming rooms, never to reappear.

"You see," began the girl, "Mr. Twyford was a great psychologist."

"But do you mean to say," said the incredulous Bobby, "that he told you his system before he left?"

She nodded.

"By the way," he added, "do you know he lost nearly 200,000 francs last night?"

She nodded again.

"I guessed that," she said, "but I don't think that will worry him very much."

"What was the system?" said Bobby.

"I was telling you," said the girl severely, "when you interrupted. He studied the people of Monte Carlo, especially the gambling people, for eight years, and the thing he discovered was that there are conditions under which a gambler cannot win. If a man is worried about some outside matter, if he is losing steadily and cannot afford to lose, or if he comes to the tables and simply must win money, Mr. Twyford knew that whatever else happened, his money would go, and the majority of his stakes would vanish.

And when he found this out he took the trouble to discover who at Monte Carlo was in trouble, who wanted money very badly, who was playing with their last stakes — and he played against them. If they backed red he backed black, if they backed *couleur* he backed *invers.*"

"Good lord!" gasped Bobby; "was that playing the game?"

"That's what I asked him," said the girl, "and he had no difficulty in convincing me that it was. It was not he who was influencing the bad luck of the others, their bad luck was simply influencing him to fortune. Sometimes the man with the bad luck would only lose a few thousand francs, and Mr. Twyford would win hundreds of thousands by betting against him. If he knew a man or woman whom he had played against was ruined, he always made good their losses before they left—he said he could afford to, because he was very often playing twelve thousand francs against their forty. He said it is the only system in the world, and I believe it is."

"But why did he lose last night?" asked Bobby, and the girl smiled.

"I suppose it was because he was playing against somebody who ought to have been radiantly happy," she said. "Didn't you hear him ask me if I had accepted you?"

The Clue of Monday's Settling

It did not seem possible to May Antrim that such things could happen in an ordered world. She paced the terrace of the big house overlooking the most beautiful vale in Somerset, her hands clasped behind her, her pretty head bent, a frown of perplexity upon her pretty face.

Everything must go . . . Sommercourt . . . the home farms . . . the house in Curzon Street . . . her horses . . . she checked a sob and was angry with herself that it needed the check.

And why?

Because John Antrim had signed a paper—she thought such things only happened in romances. Her father's stability she had never questioned. She knew, as all the county knew, that he was a wealthy man beyond fear of disaster. And out of the blue had come this shattering bolt. It was incredible. Then she caught a glimpse of him. He was sitting in his favorite seat at the far end of the terrace, and at the sight of that dejected figure, she quickened her pace.

He looked up with a faint smile as she came up to him, dropping her hand on his shoulder.

"Well, May? Thinking things out, too?"

"I'm trying to," she said, "but I find it diffi-

cult to make a start. You see, dear, I don't understand business . . ."

"Sit down."

He made a place for her by his side.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Sounds formidable, eh? It begins on the 18th of March when the steamship *Phœnician Prince* left New York for Southampton. She is a vessel of 18,000 tons, one of two, the property of the Balte Brothers, Septimus Balte and Francis Balte being the partners who control the stock."

"Our Francis?" asked the girl in surprise.

"Our Francis," repeated John Antrim grimly.

He went on:

"On board were five million in British, French, and Italian notes, which had been redeemed from the American money market, and were being consigned to the Anglo-American Bank of London. These were packed in six tin cases, soldered air and water tight, and enclosed in stout wooden boxes. They were deposited in the strong-room, which is on the port side of G Deck. Its door opens into a cabin which is occupied in extraordinary circumstances by a quartermaster.

"On this occasion one of the owners was on board, Mr. Francis Balte, and because of the importance of the consignment he had the quartermaster's cabin fitted up for his own use. During the day, and when Mr. Balte was absent from the cabin, it was occupied by his personal steward, Deverly.

"Francis kept the key of the strong-room in his possession. It never left him day or night. On the night of the 26th, the purser went to Francis with certain documents relating to the money. Francis opened the doors of the strong-room and the purser checked the packages; the door was closed and locked. There was no bath-room attached to the cabin, and Balte used an ordinary sponge bath which was brought in by the steward, together with a dozen small towels. These were used to lay on the floor, with the idea of saving the carpet, which had been newly laid—in fact, especially for Mr. Balte's comfort. The steward went in later, took away the bath and six towels, the other six being unused."

May frowned again. What had the towels to do with the narrative?

He must have interpreted her thoughts.

"I have interviewed the steward," he said, "and the loss of the towels seemed to him to be the queerest part of the whole proceedings. The next morning, as the ship approached the Needles, the purser came down, accompanied by half a dozen seamen. Balte was asleep, but he got up and handed the key of the strong-room to the purser, who opened the doors, to find—nothing."

He groaned.

"I should never have underwritten such a vast amount."

"You underwrite!" she gasped. "Is that why . . . you are responsible for the money?"

He nodded.

"It was stark madness," he said bitterly. "Ordinarily I should only have been saddled with a small proportion of the loss. But in a moment of insanity I accepted the whole risk. That is the story.

"The ship was searched from end to end—every inch of it. The steward was on duty in the alleyway outside—he sat with his back to the door, dozing he admits. It was impossible for anybody to get through the porthole, supposing, as was the first theory of the police, that a man let himself down over the side and scrambled through the port. The steward was full of the mystery of the towels—six towels and six boxes of notes! But in one respect he was very informative. He distinctly heard in the middle of the night a sound like that of a watch or clock being wound up. 'Creak, creak, creak'—he gave me a wonderful imitation."

"What on earth was it?"

"He heard it six times faintly but distinctly. He says so now, but he also says that he thought it might have been the creaking of gear—one hears strange noises on board ship. And we come again to the fact that six towels were missing. To my mind that is significant. The boxes were very heavy, by the way, many of the notes were of small denomination and had been subjected to hydraulic pressure in the packing to get them into as small a compass as possible. Roughly each box weighed 140 pounds with its iron clamps and bands."

May was interested.

"I never realized that paper money had weight," she said. "How many five pound notes could an ordinary man carry?"

"A strong man could carry £100,000 worth," replied Antrim, " but he would not care to carry that amount very far. So there it is, my dear. Somewhere in the world is a clever thief in the possession of nearly a third of a ton of negotiable paper. And I am responsible."

They sat in silence until——

"Daddy . . . why don't you see Bennett Audain?"

"Bennett?" he was startled, and then a smile played at the corner of his lips. "Bennett came to me just before I left town. He had heard from somebody that I was involved and, like the good fellow that he is, offered to help with . . . with money. I had an idea that I would see Francis."

She pursed her lips thoughtfully. Francis Balte she knew and did not dislike. She had met him at the house in town—a vague, cheery man, full of commonplace phrases.

"You mean that I should let Bennett take the case in hand?" asked John Antrim, with a little grimace. "I mistrust amateur detectives, and although I admit your cousin is clever—he is also the veriest amateur. Curiously enough the loss of the towels interested him more than the loss of the money."

Her mind was made up.

"You are to telephone Bennett that we are dining with him tonight," she said determinedly.

"My dear——"

"Daddy, you must do it—I feel that Bennett is the one man who can help."

. . . . . .

The real seven ages of man's conscious existence may be divided into the periods when he wishes to drive a locomotive, when he wants to be a detective, an Adonis, a soldier (or sailor), a millionaire, a prime minister, and a boy.

Bennett Audain never got beyond the second period, but he realized some of the others, for he had been a soldier, he was undoubtedly good-looking, and as unquestionably rich.

The right kind of obsession is an invaluable asset for a young man of great possessions, and to current crime he devoted the passionate interest of the enthusiast. He was both student and worker; he had as great a knowledge of the science which is loosely described as "criminology" as men who had gained fame in its exposition; he certainly understood the psychology of the criminal mind better than any police officer that ever came from Scotland Yard—an institution which has produced a thousand capable men, but never a genius. Indefatigable, patient, scientific in the sense that science is the "fanaticism for veracity," which is the scientist's basic quality.

"It is queer that a fellow like you should take up psycho-analysis. I should have thought it was just a little off your beat." John Antrim looked critically through his glass of port.

"There are queerer things," said Bennett, with an amused glance at the girl. "It is queer, for example, that having taken a hundred-mile journey to consult me about the strong-room robbery, you haven't yet mentioned it."

The girl smiled, but the frown on her father's face deepened.

"Don't sneer at psycho-analysis, Daddy," she warned him. "Bennett will give us a demonstration—won't you, Bennett?"

They were dining together at Bennett Audain's house in Park Lane. The big room was dark save for the shaded lamps on the table and the soft glow that flushed the Persian rug before a dying fire.

Bennett had a nervous smile, charming in its diffidence.

"That is a popular label for a queer new system of mind-probing," he said. "I am not accepting or rejecting the Freudian philosophy, and I'm not enough of a doctor to understand his theory of neuroses. I merely say that those responsible for the detection and prevention of crime might, with profit, employ the theory of idea-association."

A gust of wind blew a pattering of rain against the curtained window.

"Humph!" said John Antrim, and looked at his watch.

Bennett laughed softly.

"I knew you would look at your watch when

you heard the rain," he said, and the other stared.

"Why?"

"Association of ideas," said the other calmly. "You told me when you came that you thought of leaving May in London and driving back alone to Sommercourt. Uncle John," he leant across, coming from the dusk of shadow into the yellow light, "if I could get the right man to question I would save you exactly a million!"

Antrim frowned horribly.

"I doubt it," he said, in his gruffest tone. "I have been caught. But I was a fool to underwrite the whole consignment—a mad fool. You can do nothing; the best and cleverest police officers are working on the case. What could you do—by psycho-analysis?"

He leant back with a sigh.

"Who is the right man?" asked May eagerly.

Bennett, his eyes fixed on vacancy, did not answer at once.

"Where is Francis?"

The girl started, as well she might, for the question was shot at him with unexpected violence.

"I'm sorry—only I had an idea"—Bennett Audain was apologetic to a point of panic. "I—I get a little explosive at times, which is terribly unscientific——"

"But is human," smiled the other.

John Antrim got up.

"I wonder if he is at the Elysium Club——"

"There is a 'phone over there." Bennett pointed to the shadows. "It is rather late, but perhaps he'll come round."

Antrim hesitated. Before he could make up his mind what to do, May was 'phoning.

Apparently Balte was at the club.

"He's on his way," she smiled; "poor soul, he was most embarrassed to hear my voice."

May returned to the table.

"Heavens, what a night! You can't return to Sommercourt, Daddy."

The rain was swishing savagely at the windows, the ceaseless broom-like sweep of it across the panes, the faint tick of the enamel clock on the high mantelpiece, and the wheezy breathing of Bennett's old terrier, stretched before the fire, were the only sounds in the room until Balte came with a clatter.

He was a stout man of thirty-five, fair and ruddy of face, and he brought into the shadowy room something of his own inexhaustible vitality.

"Glad to come, Miss Antrim." He stopped dead at the sight of John Antrim. "Pretty wild night, eh—I'm blessed if it has stopped blowing since I arrived. Old Sep writes that he was in Torquay yesterday, and the sea was absolutely breaking over the front—tramcars drenched and wrecked. Funny, being wrecked in a tramcar."

He put his red hands to the blaze and rattled on.

"Dreadful thing, eh, Miss Antrim? What's

the use of the police—eh? What's the use of 'em? Want men like Audain, full of up-to-date ideas. Wish it had been anybody but you, Antrim." He shook his head mournfully.

"Ever heard of Freud?" asked Bennett, his chin on his clasped hands, his absent gaze on the fire.

"Freud—no. German, isn't he? Nothing to do with the Germans, old boy, after that beastly war. They sunk three of our ships, by gad! Who is he, anyway?"

"A professor," said Bennett lazily, "and an authority on the mind. Why don't you sit down, Balte?"

"Prefer standing, old boy. Stand and grow better—eh, Miss Antrim? What about this Hun?"

"He interprets dreams——"

"Ought to be in the Police, that's where he ought to be—interpreting some of those pipe-dreams they have," he chuckled.

"I will tell you what I am getting at," said Bennett and explained.

May held her breath, sensing the deadliness of the play.

Mr. Balte was amused.

"You say one word and I'll tell you a word it suggests?" he said. "That's a kid's game—used to play it when I was so high. You say 'sugar,' I say 'sweet'; next fellow says 'orange,' and so forth."

"You see, Mr. Balte," interrupted May, "Bennett thinks he can get at your sub-con-

scious mind. He believes that he can even tell what happened when you were asleep."

Mr. Balte pulled at his nose and looked down. He was thinking. He wondered if Bennett Audain could get at his mind about May Antrim, and could put into words all that he had dreamed yet had not dared to say, all that he had schemed for. The thought caught his breath. He loved her so, this girl whose beautiful face had never left his vision; he had dared so much for her and she never knew. To her he was one of the thousands who served as a background of life.

"Try, old boy," he said huskily; "I don't believe in it, but if you can get hold of any information that will help Mr. Antrim—you don't know how I feel about that—go ahead."

"Sit down."

Mr. Balte obeyed. His china-blue eyes were fixed on his interrogator.

"Ground," said Bennett unexpectedly.

"Eh—er—er—earth," responded the other.

"Dig."

"Garden."

"Hole."

"Er—I nearly said 'devil,'" chuckled Mr. Balte. "This is funny—like a game!"

But it was an earnest game with Bennett Audain. Presently:

"Shares," he said.

"Slump," it came promptly, one word suggested by the other. Balte added: "Everything is slumping just now, you know . . ."

They went on quickly. Bennett recited the days of the week.

"Monday?"

A grimace—the faintest—from Balte.

"Er—— Unpleasant—starting the week, y'know."

Bennett shot out the days.

"Friday?"

"Calendar—thinking of a calendar, y'know."

"Key?"

"Wi——door."

He got up.

"A silly game, Audain." He shook his head reproachfully. "Admit it. I can't play games—too worried. Poor old Sep is half off his head, too."

"Where is Septimus?" asked Bennett.

"At Slapton—pike-fishing. Rum how people can sit in a punt all day . . . fishing. Well, what are you going to do, Audain? Can you help us? The police—pshaw!"

"Will you tell me this?" asked Bennett. "Are you a heavy sleeper?"

The stout man shook his head.

"Do you sleep late in the mornings?"

"No; up at six, bright and jolly." He paused. "Now I come to think of it, I was very sleepy *that* morning. Drugs, eh . . . do you think I was drugged—chloroform and that sort of thing?"

"No," said Bennett, and let him go.

"Well?" asked the girl when the door had closed upon the visitor.

"Stay in town for a day or two," said Bennett Audain.

At seven o'clock the next morning he called a justly annoyed police inspector from his bed. Fortunately Bennett knew him very well.

"Yes, Mr. Audain; his trunks were searched. Mr. Balte insisted."

"How many trunks had he in the cabin?"

The inspector, cursing such matutinal inquisitiveness, answered:

"Four."

"Four? Big ones?"

"Yes, sir; pretty big and half empty."

"Did you smell anything peculiar about them?"

The inspector wagged his head impatiently. His legs were getting cold and the bed he had left was entrancingly warm.

"No, sir, I did *not* smell them."

"Good," said Bennett's cheerful voice.

"The worst of these amateur detectives is that they jump all ways at once," said the inspector as he shuddered back to bed.

"M'm," said his wife, on the border-line of wakefulness.

Bennett, at his end of the wire, gloomed out of the window into the gray moist morning on to the stark, uneasy branches of park trees.

The hour was 7.5. Essential people had not yet turned in their beds; even the serving-maids and men-servants had scarcely blinked at the toilsome day. Bennett Audain went back to

the remains of his breakfast and wished, when he had had Francis Balte under examination, he had said, "Paint." Mr. Balte would surely have responded "See."

Mr. Balte had a large house at Wimbledon. He was a bachelor, as was his brother. He was a simple man, as also was his brother. They had inherited considerable property at a time—the last year of the war—when property had a fictitious value. The cream of their father's estate had been swallowed by the Treasury in the shape of death duties. Their skimmed milk was very thin and blue in the days of the great slump. Stockholders in Balte Brothers Incorporated Shippers—and they were many—watched the shrinking of profits indignantly. The last general meeting of the Company had been a noisy one. There was one fellow in particular, a bald man with spectacles, Francis had noted miserably from his place on the platform—a violent, intemperate man, who had talked of a change of directors, and he had received more "hear-hears" than had Francis when he had expressed the pious hope that trade would improve and shipping return to its old prosperity.

It was Sunday morning, and Francis sat in his library. It was a room containing many shelves of books which he had never read, but the bindings of which were in the best taste. His elbows were on the table, his fingers in his untidy hair, and he was reading. Not the Sunday newspapers, his usual Sunday's occupation.

These were stacked, unopened, on the little table by the easy-chair. It was a book, commonly and commercially bound, and the more he read the more bewildered he grew. A little shocked also, for this volume was embarrassingly intimate.

Thus his brother found him. Septimus, lank and bent and short-sighted, glared through his powerful glasses at the studious figure and sniffed.

"Got it?" he asked.

Francis closed the book with a bang.

"It is all medical stuff," he said. "Audain is a bit cranky. Going?"

The question was unnecessary. Septimus was muffled to the chin, his fur gloves were under his arm, and his big racing car was visible from the library window.

"If there is anything in this Audain stuff, let me know. I've read something about psycho-analysis—I thought it was for shell-shocked people. So long."

"When will you be back?"

"Tuesday night. I've written the letter."

"Oh."

Francis stirred the fire thoughtfully.

"Create a bit of a stir your resigning from the Board," he said; "wish . . ."

"Yes?"

"No, I don't. I was going to say that I wished it was me. Better you. Everybody knows you're in bad health. . . . Warm enough?"

"Ay," said his brother, and went out pulling on his gloves.

Francis did not go to the window to see him off. He bent over the fire uncomfortably, jabbing it unreasonably.

It occurred to him after a long time that his brother had not gone. He put down the poker and shuffled across to the window—he was wearing slippers. There were two cars in the road, bonnet to bonnet, and a man was standing by the seated Septimus. They were talking.

"Audain," said Francis, and meditated, biting his lip. Presently Septimus went off and Bennett Audain came briskly up the path. Francis admitted him.

"Energetic fellow!" he cried. His voice was an octave higher than it had been when he spoke to his brother, his manner more virile and masterful. He was good cheer and complacency personified. "Come in, come in. You saw old Sep? Poor old chap!"

"He tells me that he is resigning from the shipping business." Bennett was warming his hands.

"Yes; he's going to the south of France, old Sep. Going to buy property. Queer bird, Sep. But he was always a land man—farms, houses . . . anything to do with land . . . very shrewd."

Bennett glanced at the table, and the other anticipated.

"*Interpretation of Dreams* — eh?" he chuckled. "You've got me going on Freud.

Don't understand it. Of course I understand what he says about dreaming and all that . . . but that game of yours . . . eh?''

Bennett changed the subject, Francis wondering.

''Yes, it is not a bad house,'' he agreed amiably. ''A bit bourgeoise, but we're that kind. Quaintly constructed—would you like to see over it?''

A home and its attractions can be a man's weakness. In a woman, its appointments are the dominating values; architecture means no more than convenience. And Bradderly Manor was a source of satisfaction to Francis. They reached the wind-swept grounds in time, because there was a workshop in which old Sep labored. It was to him what laboratory, studio, music-room, model dairy, and incubatory are to other men. It was a workshop, its walls lined with tool cabinets. There was a bench, an electric lathe, vices, drills . . . an oak panel with its unfinished cupids and foliage testified to the artistry and workmanship of Septimus Balte.

''Always was a wonderful workman, old Sep,'' said Francis in admiration. ''Do you know, he was the inventor of a new depth charge that would have made his name if the war hadn't finished——''

''That's it, is it?''

Francis looked round.

Bennett had taken from a shelf a large paint can. It had not been opened. The manufacturer's

red label pasted on the top of the sunken lid was unbroken.

"That's what?"

Bennett held the can for a second and replaced it.

"Luminous paint," he said. "Lefvre's—he's the best maker, isn't he?"

Francis Balte said nothing. All the way back to the house he said nothing. Bennett followed him into the library and watched him as he filled a pipe from a jar which he took from the mantelpiece.

"Well?" he said miserably. Bennett saw tears in his eyes.

"The two things I am not sure about are," Bennett ticked them off on his fingers: "One, was John Steele the cause? Two, why the towels?"

The stout man puffed furiously and all the time his eyes went blink, blink, blink.

"Friday—Calendar; that's how you knew. You wouldn't think I'd fall so easily. But you must have known all about it or why should you know I meant the *Racing Calendar?*"

"I guessed. I did not know that you and your brother had a stud of horses and raced them in the name of John Steele. That was easy to discover. When I decided that it was the *Racing Calendar* you meant, the official journal of the Jockey Club, I went to the publishers and got the register of assumed names."

The pipe puffed agitatedly.

"No . . . we lost money on racing, but that

wasn't it; bad business . . . over-valuation of assets. I wonder what she will think about me . . ."

He sank down in a chair, the pipe dropped from his mouth, and he wept into his big red hands.

. . . . . .

"I have no interest in punishment," said Bennett Audain, and May Antrim, watching the pain in his delicate face, nodded. She was beginning to understand Bennett Audain.

"In solutions of curious human puzzles, yes," said Bennett, as he sipped his tea and noted joyously the first splashes of green that had come to the park trees in one night, "but not in punishment. If you like to put it that way, I am unmoral. Your father received his money?"

"Of course he did, Bennett—the six boxes arrived at his office yesterday morning."

Bennett laughed very softly.

"It is good to be alive when the buds are breaking, May. I feel a very happy man. Suppose you wanted a clockwork contrivance made, where would you go to get the work done? Look up the Classified Directory. No mention of clockwork-makers or makers of mechanical toys. Yet there are ten people in London who do nothing else. There is a man named Collett in Highbury who made a sort of time-bomb during the war. I went to him after I had learnt that Septimus Balte was working on war inventions. I found that by patient inquiry. It is queer how soon

people have forgotten all things pertaining to the war."

"But why did you inquire about clockwork at all?" asked the girl.

"Creak!" mocked Bennett. "Did your father tell you how the steward had heard a noise, six noises, as of a watch being wound? Well, I found Mr. Collett a secretive, furtive man, but reasonable. He had made a simple water-tight machine. It operated a large spool which was held in position by a catch and released three hours after it had been set. Is that clear?"

May nodded.

"Why water-tight?" asked Bennett. "The spool itself was outside, and presumably was designed to work in the water. Attached to the steel box containing the mechanism were two iron bolts, one at the top above the spool, one at the bottom. Now what was attached to the spool? Nothing but ten fathoms of stout light, cord, a double length of it. Now do you see?"

"No," admitted the puzzled girl.

"Then I will explain further. At the end of the cord was a small cork buoy, probably covered with canvas and certainly treated with luminous paint. The towels——" he laughed, "I ought to have thought of the use to which they would be put, but I had not seen the cabin. And the strange thing is that when I put myself in the place of Francis, it never occurred to me that if boxes weighing 140 pounds and clamped with iron were pushed through a porthole, the

brass casings of the port would be scratched—unless the boxes were wrapped in cloth of some kind."

"Then he threw the boxes into the sea!" gasped May, sitting back.

Bennett nodded.

"First he took the buoys and attachments from his trunks, then he wound up the mechanism, threw that and the buoy out of the port-hole—the buoy being attached by a short length of chain to the under-bolt of the clock-work case—then he heaved up the money-box and pushed that after. They sank immediately. No belated passenger leaning over the rail would see a luminous buoy floating back. Nobody saw those buoys but Septimus, waiting in his motor-boat twelve miles south of Slapton Sands. And he did not see them until the three hours passed and, the spools releasing the buoys, they came to the surface. Then he fastened a stouter rope to one of the double cords and rove it through the bolt. . . . He salvaged all six boxes in an hour, which isn't bad for a sick man."

She shook her head helplessly.

"How . . . why . . . did you guess?"

"Guess?" Bennett's eyebrows rose. "It wasn't a guess. Who else would have stolen the boxes? In fiction the thief is the last man you suspect. In fact, the thief is the last man you'd acquit. The police always suspect the man who was last seen near the scene of the crime, and the police are generally right. I knew half the Balte secret when the word 'key' suggested

'wind' and 'Monday'—the day racing men settle their bets—suggested 'unpleasant.' "

He looked at his watch.

"Francis and 'poor old Sep' should at this moment be boarding the *Rotterdam* at Plymouth," he said.

"But why . . . he had heavy losses, but he would not have been ruined. Did he want the money so badly——"

"There is a woman in the case," said Bennett gravely. "Somebody he dreamt about and planned for."

"Poor man!" said May softly. There were tears in her eyes, he noticed, and remembered Francis Balte's words: "I wonder what she will think about me?"

Code No. 2

The Secret Service never call themselves anything so melodramatic. If they speak at all, it is vaguely of "The Department"—not even "The Intelligence Department," you will note. It is a remarkable department, however, and not the least of the remarkable men who served—in a minor capacity, it is true—was Schiller.

He was an inventive young Swiss with a passion for foreign languages. He knew all the bad men in London—bad from the violently political standpoint—and was useful to the Chief Secretary (Intelligence), though Bland and the big men . . . well, they didn't dislike him, but they sort of . . . I don't know how to put it.

Watch a high-spirited horse pass a scrap of white paper on the road. He doesn't exactly shy, but he looks at the flapping thing very expectantly.

He was never in the Big Game, though he tried his best to get there. But the Big Game was played by men who "chew ciphers in the cradle," as Bland put it.

In some mysterious way Schiller got to know that Reggie Batten had been shot dead whilst extracting the mobilization orders of the 14th Bavarian Corps from a safe in Munich—this

was in '11, and the sad occurrence was described as an "aviation accident."

The Munich military authorities took Reggie's body up in an aeroplane and dropped it . . . and the Munich newspapers gave poor Reggie some beautiful notices, and said that the funeral would be at two o'clock, and they hoped that all his loving friends would gather round. Such of his unsuspecting acquaintances as did gather were arrested and searched, their lodgings and baggage ransacked, and were in due course most incontinently sent across the frontier.

Bland, who was in Munich, did not attend the funeral; in fact, he left the beer city without lingering unnecessarily.

He was back in town only a day when Schiller asked for an interview.

Bland, square-chinned, clean-shaven, and wholly impassive, heard particulars of Schiller's application and laughed.

"You are altogether wrong in your view of Mr. Batten," he said. "He was unconnected with this department, and his death was due to a very deplorable accident. Therefore I cannot give you his job."

Schiller heard and bowed.

"I have been misinformed, sir," he said politely.

He went to work in another way and made a carefully planned attack upon the Chief Secretary, who had reached that delicate stage of a man's career which is represented by the in-

terregnum between the end of a period of usefulness and the consciousness of the fact.

Sir John Grandor had been in his time the greatest Intelligence man in Europe, but now—he still talked of wireless telegraphy as "a wonderful invention."

Yet Sir John was chief, and a fairly shrewd chief. His seal of office was Code No. 2, which no mortal eye had seen save his. It lay on the bottom shelf of the safe between steel-bound covers, sheet after sheet of close writing in his own neat hand.

No. 2 Code is a very secret one. It is the code which the big agents employ. It is not printed, nor are written copies circulated, but is learnt under the tuition of the Chief himself. The men who know Code No. 2 do not boast of their knowledge, because their lives hang upon a thread—even in peace time.

Schiller could never be a big agent. For one thing, he was a naturalized foreign subject and the big men are nationals, trained to the Game from the day they enter the Office. They are educated men, condemned for life to dissociate themselves from the land of their birth, and who they are, or where they live, is known only to three men, two of whom have no official existence.

Sir John liked Schiller and did many things for him. He told him stories of his past adventures and Schiller listened attentively. In the course of one of these post-prandial discussions (he was a most presentable young man, and Sir

John frequently took him home to dinner), Schiller casually mentioned Code No. 2. He spoke of it with easy familiarity, and Sir John discussed the Code in general terms. He told his guest how it was kept in the special safe, how it was made up on the loose-leaf system, and how it was a nuisance because it was always in disorder because he had to consult it every day, and invariably replaced the sheets he had been using on the top, irrespective of their alphabetical right to that position.

The young man had innocently suggested that he should come to Sir John's office every night and sort them out, but the old man smiled benevolently and had said he thought not.

Bland summoned Grigsby to his office one day, and that florid young man came to the tick of the clock.

"This fellow Schiller is bothering me," said Bland in the low tones which are almost second nature in the Service. "He is a smart fellow and very useful, but I mistrust him."

He has a blameless record," said the other, staring out of the window, "and he knows little of the bigger things—Sir John is a ditherer, but he's close enough. What is worrying you now?"

Bland strode up and down the room.

"He is inventing a new wireless receiver," he said, "and he has got the old man interested. He works all day at it in his room, and at night he carries it down to Sir John's office, where it is most religiously locked in the safe.

"Of course, it is absurd to imagine that the box—it is about the size of a biscuit-tin—can contain anything with human intelligence and get out in an air-tight safe and walk around, or go squinting at the code; but, somehow, I don't like it."

Grigsby chuckled.

"It's a new one on me," he confessed. "I'm not denying that Schiller isn't clever; he invented a draught excluder for my room which is a model of ingenuity, but I can hardly imagine a wireless receiver which reads and transmits a code from the interior of a steel safe."

But Bland was not convinced.

He sent for May Prince. She was holiday-making in Devonshire, but came at once to town: a straight slip of a girl—she looked eighteen, though in truth she was ten years older—with the loveliest smile in the world, a pair of appraising gray eyes, and a mouth which, in repose, was a little inclined to droop.

"Sorry to disturb you on your holiday," said Bland, "but I want Schiller kept under observation. Next week you will be discharged from the Department for neglect of duty. You will retire with a grievance, and you will tell Schiller, whom you will continue to meet, that I am a beast and that I lose a great deal of money backing racehorses. I will have a few bookmakers' accounts prepared for you, which you will show discreetly."

"Is he to blackmail you?" she asked.

Bland shook his head.

"If he is all I think he is, he will not. No, he might give you confidence for confidence—so long."

And May, with a nod, went out.

Schiller's invention took an unconscionable time to develop. Yet he was enthusiastic over its possibilities and inspired the Chief with some of his enthusiasm. He worked in his spare time at the machine, and regularly every evening at five minutes to six he would carry his heavy box to the Chief's office, solemnly deposit his burden on the iron grill which formed the one shelf of the safe, and watch the locking up with a jealous eye.

And May Prince had nothing to report. Three days before that fatal 1st of August which brought so much destruction and misery to Europe, Bland, who had been working day and night in the interest of his department, went up to Schiller's room to question him regarding the *bona fides* of a certain Antonio Malatesta, suspected of being an agent of the Central Powers. Bland very seldom visited the offices of his subordinates, but on this occasion his 'phone was out of order.

He found the door locked and knocked impatiently. Presently it was opened by the smiling Schiller. The table was covered with a litter of wire, electric batteries, tools, and screws, but of the great wireless receiver there was no sign.

"You are looking for my wonder-box, sir?"

said Schiller. "She is in my safe—soon I will give you the most remarkable demonstration! Even today I caught a signal from the Admiralty—through a closed window."

Bland was not listening.

He stood erect, his nose in the air, sniffing.

There was a faint, sweetish smell—a scent of camphor and something else. Schiller watched him through narrowed eyes.

"H'm," said Bland, and, turning on his heel, left the room.

A telegram lay on the table. It had been delivered in his brief absence:

> "Schiller is agent in Central European pay. He is head of cryptogram department. Have proof.—MAY."

Bland pulled open the drawer of his desk, took out an automatic pistol, and raced through the door, and took the stairs two at a time.

Schiller's door was open, but he had gone.

He had not passed out through the lobby or the front entrance of the building, but a commissionaire on duty at the side door had seen him pass and had heard him hail a cab.

Bland went back to his office and put through a 'phone call to the police:

"Watch all railway stations and docks. Arrest and detain Augustus Schiller."

He described him briefly, but with a sure touch.

"It is very lamentable," said Sir John, really

troubled, "but I can't think he has taken away anything of importance. Has he removed his invention?"

"I have that all right, Sir John," said Bland grimly, "and tonight with your permission I am going to see what happens."

"But surely you don't think——?"

Bland nodded.

"I haven't monkeyed with it at all, but I've listened very carefully through a microphone and there is no doubt that it contains a clockwork mechanism. It is almost silent, but I have detected the sound. I suggest that we place the box where it is usually put, leave the safe door open, and watch."

Sir John frowned. All this seemed a reflection on his judgment and, as such, was to be resented, but he was too loyal a man in the Service to which he had given forty-five years of his life to allow his injured vanity to come before his public duty.

At six o'clock the box was placed in the safe.

"Is that where it was always put?" asked Bland.

"I generally—in fact invariably—put it on the iron grid."

"Just above Code 2, I see, sir."

The Chief Secretary frowned again, but this time in an effort of thought.

"That is true," he said slowly; "once, I remember, when the box was placed a little to one side Schiller pushed it to the center, which I thought was a little impertinent of him."

The two men drew up a couple of arm-chairs and seated themselves before the safe.

Their vigil promised to be a long one.

Eight, nine, ten o'clock passed, and nothing happened.

"I think it is rather ridiculous, don't you?" asked Sir John testily, as the quarter to eleven chimed.

"It seems so," said Bland doggedly, "but I want to see—good God—look!"

Sir John gasped.

Immediately beneath the box was Code 2, enclosed in a leather binder, the edges of which were bound, for durability sake, with a thin ribbon of steel.

Now, slowly the cover of the book was rising. It jerked up a little then fell, leapt again and fell back, as though there were something inside which was struggling to get free. Then of a sudden the cover opened and remained stiffly erect, forming, with the contents, the letter L, the upright of which was the cover.

There was a "click," and the interior of the safe was illuminated with a soft greenish radiance. It threw a glow upon the top page of the code which lasted for nearly a minute. Then it died away and the cover of the book fell.

"Phew!" whistled Bland.

He lifted the black box carefully from the safe and carried it to Sir John's desk, examined the bottom of the box with a long and patient scrutiny, then set it down.

"Code No. 2 is in the hands of the enemy, sir," he said.

It was daylight when he finished his investigations. Half the box was taken up by accumulators. They supplied the current which, operating through a powerful magnet, lifted the cover of the Code-book. They gave the light to the wonderful little mercurial-vapor lamps, which afforded the concealed camera just enough light to make an effective exposure.

"The little clockwork arrangement is, of course, simple," said Bland, "that sets the time for the machine to work and switches the current on and off. It probably opens and closes the shutters which hide the lens and the lamp and the magnet. I suspected the camera when I smelt the film in his room."

Sir John, white and haggard, nodded.

"Get me out of this as well as you can, Bland," he said gruffly. "I'll retire at the end of the year. I'm a damned old man."

He walked to the door and paused with his fingers on the handle.

"There are thirty men's lives in Schiller's keeping," he said; "their names and addresses are in that book. I suppose he got through the book. I am so careless that I changed the order of the pages almost every day, and the devil has been at work for nine months. He ought to have worked through the book by now, for there was a different sheet on top every time."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Bland.

Schiller was away—and safely away—before war was declared. He was seen in Holland and was traced to Cologne. There was no possibility of changing the code, and messages were already coming through from agents.

Bland took a bold step. Through a man in Denmark he got into communication with Schiller and offered to make a deal. But Schiller was not selling. In the telegraphed words of the emissary whom Bland had sent:

> "Schiller is receiving an enormous fee from enemy government for decoding wireless messages that your agents are sending. He alone knows the code."

Nothing daunted, Bland again got into communication with the traitor, offering him an enormous sum if he would consent to return to a neutral country and retain his secret.

"Meet me in Holland, and I will fix everything," his message ended. It elicited a reply which was characteristic of the ingenious master-spy:

"Come into Belgium and I will arrange."

A mad suggestion, for Belgium was now enemy ground, but Bland took his life in his hands, and a long glass dagger in his handbag, and left the same night for the Continent.

Bland went into Belgium by the back door and made a laborious way to Brussels. It would not be in the national interest to explain the

means and methods he employed to make his entry into that carefully guarded land, but it is sufficient to say that he met Schiller, looking very prosperous, in the *estaminet* of the Gold Lion at Hazbruille, a small village on the Ghent-Lille Road.

"You are a very brave man, Mr. Bland," complimented Schiller, "and I wish I could oblige you in what you wish. Unfortunately, I cannot."

"Then why did you bring me here?" asked Bland.

The other looked at him curiously.

"I have a certain code," he said quietly. "I have it complete with certain exceptions: there are three pages missing. What do you want for them?"

Here was a staggerer for a smaller man than Bland.

"That is a fair offer," he said, calmness itself, "but what is the particular code you are buying?"

"No. 2," said the other, "I thought——"

Bland interrupted him.

"No. 2 Code?" he said, sipping his bock (he was for the time being a Belgian peasant). "Of course, that's rubbish. Neither you nor I know No. 2 Code; the code you stole was No. 3."

Schiller smiled superiorly.

"When you get back to London," he said, "ask your Chief whether 'Agate' does not mean 'Transports loading at Borkum.'"

"You might have got hold of that particular word by accident," said Bland grudgingly.

"Ask him if 'Optique' does not mean 'Emperor has gone to Dresden,' " persisted the calm Schiller.

Bland looked round the room thoughtfully.

"You know a great deal, my friend," he said.

The woman who managed the *estaminet* came in a little later and found Bland pulling slowly at a rank cigar, his elbows on the table, a half-emptied bock before him.

The woman glanced with a little smile at Schiller.

"He's tired," said Bland, emptying the bock. "Let him sleep on. And don't let the flies disturb him," he added humorously.

Schiller lay sideways on the bench at which Bland was sitting, his face to the wall, and over his head was a coarse blue handkerchief.

"He will not be disturbed," said Madame, and pocketed the five-sou tip that Bland gave her with a grateful smirk.

"When he wakes," said Bland at the door, "tell him I have gone on to Ghent."

Three hours later a German landsturm soldier who had come for his evening coffee, whisked away the handkerchief which covered the sleeper's face, and stammered:

"Gott!"

For Schiller was dead, and had been dead for three hours. It took even the doctor quite a

long time to discover the blade of the glass dagger in his heart.

A week after this Bland was dressing for dinner in his West End flat, and had reached the patience stage of bow-tying, when his valet informed him that Grigsby had called.

"I told him you were dressing, sir," said Taylor, "but Mr. Grigsby is that full of his horse winning the Gatwick steeplechase that he won't take 'No' for an answer."

Taylor was a privileged person, and was permitted to be critical even of Bland's friends. Taylor was an ideal servant from his master's point of view, being simple and garrulous. To a man in Bland's profession garrulity in a servant was a virtue because it kept the employer always on his guard, never allowed him the delusion of safety or the luxury of indiscretion. Moreover, one knew what a garrulous servant was thinking and, through the medium of secret agents, what he was saying.

"Show him up here," said Bland after a while.

Mr. Grigsby came noisily into the dressing-room, though his greeting of Bland was a little cold.

"I've a bone to pick with you," he said. "What the devil have you been saying to Lady Greenholm about me? You know my feelings about Alice——"

"Wait a moment, please," said Bland sharply, and turned to his servant. "Taylor, you can

go to the General Post Office with the letter you will find on the hall-stand."

Mr. Grigsby waited until he heard the door of the flat close, then walked into the passage and shot the bolt of the front door.

He came back to where Bland was standing with his back to the fire, his hands thrust into his trouser pockets.

"You're sure he had No. 2?" he asked.

Bland nodded.

Grigsby bit his lip thoughtfully.

"It isn't worth while worrying about how he got it—now," he said. "The question is, who will get it next?"

Bland opened a cigar case, bit off the end of a cigar, and lit up before he replied.

"What news have you at this end?" he asked. "I was across the border before they discovered his death; naturally, I have heard nothing save what our Amsterdam man told me."

"The code is in London," said Grigsby briefly. "As soon as he was dead a cablegram was sent to Valparaiso by the authorities in Brussels. It was addressed to a man named Van Hooch—probably a third party. Here it is——"

He took out a pocket-book and laid a slip of paper on the table. The message was short and was in Spanish:

"Schiller's London lodging."

"It's rather puzzling," said Bland. "Schiller

wouldn't have written the code out—he was too clever for that. And yet he must have given the authorities a guarantee that the secret should not be lost with his death. It has probably been arranged that he should tell some person agreed upon—in this case a man in South America—in what manner the code was hidden. The exact *locale* he left until his death, probably sealed up amongst his private papers."

"That is a sound theory," said Grigsby. "He told you nothing more——?"

Bland shook his head.

"I had to kill him of course," he said with a note of regret. "It was pretty beastly, but the lives of thirty good men were in his holding. He probably knew where they were stationed."

"And the man that comes after will also know," said the other grimly. "We start tonight to make a very scientific search of his lodgings."

But the flat in Soho Square yielded no profit.

For the greater part of a fortnight three of the smartest Intelligence men (including Lecomte from the French department) probed and searched, slitting furniture, pulling up floors, and dismantling cupboards.

And the result was a negative one.

"I'll swear it is there," said Bland dejectedly. "We've overlooked something. Where is May Prince?"

"She's at the Chief Censor's. She has an office there," explained Grigsby.

"Ask her to come over."

May came in some triumph.

"I thought you'd send for me," she said. "I could have saved you such a lot of trouble!"

Bland was all apologies.

"I've neglected you terribly, May," he said. "Do you know, I have never seen you since you sent me the wire about Schiller?"

She nodded.

"I know that—Schiller is dead, isn't he?"

"How did you know?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"One reads things in the Censor's office—innocent letters from Holland, with messages written between the lines in formic acid and milk which becomes quite visible if you use the correct formulæ. Mr. Schiller was a remarkable man; and his father was one of the greatest scholars Switzerland has produced, though he was blind. What do you want of me now?"

Bland explained briefly. The girl knew of Code No. 2 and the secrecy which surrounded it, and realized the urgency of the situation.

"By the way, how did you know that he was an enemy agent?" he asked.

"I discovered *his* code," she replied cryptically.

Accompanied by the two men she went to the flat in Soho Square. The flooring had been replaced and the rooms were habitable again. She made a tour through the flat, then she returned to the big dining-room.

"This is the room where the code is," she said decisively.

It was a cheerful apartment, papered in a rich brown. A broad dado of a simple design belted the walls, and the wainscotting had been painted a chocolate color to harmonize with the paper. From the ceiling hung an electric fitting, and at this May glanced.

"We've had that down," said Bland, "and the wainscot has been taken out, but we've found nothing."

"Will you leave me alone here for a few minutes?" asked the girl.

The two men withdrew, but they were hardly out of the room before she followed, her eyes blazing with the joy of discovery.

"Got it!" she laughed. "Oh, I knew—I knew!"

"Where is it?" demanded the astonished Bland.

"Wait," she said eagerly. "When do you expect your South American visitor?"

"Tomorrow—of course, the room will be guarded and he will have no chance of searching."

Her eyes were still dancing when she nodded.

"We shall see—tomorrow. I fancy you will have a very frank visitor from Valparaiso, and when he comes I want you to send for me."

"What on earth——"

"Wait, wait, please! What will he say?" She closed her eyes and frowned. "I can tell you his name; it is Raymond Viztelli——"

"You knew this all along?" asked the astonished Grigsby, but she shook her head.

"I knew it when I went into the room," she said, "but now I am guessing. I think he will offer to help you discover the code, and he will tell you there is a secret panel in the wall, and that it will take days and days to make the discovery. And I think he will ask you to be present when he makes his search."

"He needn't ask that," said Bland unpleasantly.

"I think you're very mysterious, May, but I've a kind of feeling that you're right."

She had a few questions to ask the janitor of the building before she left.

"Mr. Schiller did all his own decorations—in the dining-room, didn't he?"

"Yes, miss," said the man. "A regular feller he was for potterin' about with a paste-pot or a paint-brush."

"And he has paid his rent in advance?"

"That's right, miss."

"And he said that nothing was to be done to the flat till he came back?"

"His very words!" said the caretaker.

"I thought so," said May.

. . . . . .

At ten o'clock next morning a card was brought to Bland. It was inscribed:

"Señor X. Bertramo Silva,"

and written in a corner, "of Valparaiso."

Bland pressed a bell, and in a little time Grigsby and the girl came in.

"He's come," said Bland shortly, and handed her the card.

The visitor was shown in. He was a dapper little man with a pointed beard, and spoke excellent English. Moreover, after the preliminaries he plunged straight into the heart of his subject.

"I am going to be very frank with you, Mr. Bland," he began; and Bland shooting a swift glance at the girl, saw the laughter in her eyes.

"I was for some time an agent of the Central Powers—I tell you this because I wish you to clearly understand my position," he went on. "Safe in South America, I thought no call would be made upon my services. A few weeks ago, however, I received a cablegram which was intercepted by the British authorities.

"I had known, of course, that in certain eventualities I might be obliged to come to England to make a search for certain documents, and that I should learn the place where they were hidden by telegram. That telegram came—I am here!"

He flung his arms dramatically.

"I came straight to you on my arrival. I tell you frankly why I came, because I decided, the night before I reached Plymouth, that the game was not worth the candle. I will assist you as far as possible to discover the documents, and then I will, if you will allow me, return to South America."

It was all very amazing to Bland. The man had said almost all that May had predicted he

would say. He looked at the girl again, and she nodded.

"You understand that your search——" began Bland.

"Will be under the eyes of the police?" interrupted the man from Valparaiso. "I would prefer it."

"You would like to start your search at once, I suppose?" asked Bland.

"The sooner the better," said the other heartily.

"One moment."

It was the girl who spoke.

"You have a very good memory, señor?" she asked.

For just a fraction of a second the smile died from the man's eyes.

"I have an excellent memory, madame," he said curtly.

They went together in a cab and were admitted to Schiller's flat by the police officer on guard.

"Have you any theory?" asked Bland as they stood in the hall.

"Yes," replied the other quickly. "I think the documents are hidden in a recess in the wall behind a secret panel. It may take a week to find the panel. This is a very old house, and it is possible Mr. Schiller chose it for some structural advantage it may have had."

Again Bland thought rapidly—the frankness of the man, his willingness to help—the talk of

secret panels was all in accordance with the girl's amazing prophecy.

He saw the glee in her eyes—glee at the mystificaton of her Chief.

Then he turned to the little man.

"Go ahead," he said.

Señor Silva bowed.

"I will take this wall first," he said, "and I will search for the evidence of a panel. My fingers are perhaps more sensitive than yours——"

His hand was outstretched toward the dado, when——

"Stop!"

At the sound of the girl's sharp warning Señor Silva turned.

"Before you go any farther," she said, "let me ask you if you value your life?"

The Chilian shrugged and spread his hands.

"Naturally, madame."

The girl turned to Bland.

"If this man learns Code 2, what will happen to him?"

Bland looked from May to the face of the stranger.

"He will certainly die," he said simply.

She nodded.

"You may go on if you wish, but you are starting a little too far to the right."

His face went a ghastly gray.

"To the right——!" he stammered.

"The message to you begins at the door, Señor Viztelli," she said calmly. "The code does

not begin until you reach the window. Will you continue?''

He shook his head, having no words.

Bland called in his men and they hustled the little South American into a cab.

''And now explain,'' said Bland.

The girl walked to the wall near the door and touched the dado.

''Feel,'' she said.

Bland's fingers touched the wall-paper gingerly. He felt a few pin-point eruptions, passed his hand to the right, and felt more. Then the truth dawned on him.

''Braille!'' he whispered. The girl nodded.

''Schiller's father was a blind man,'' she said, ''and Schiller evidently took up the study of the alphabet by which blind men read. Silva was informed how the code had been written and learnt it against the time when it would be necessary to take over Schiller's work.''

She ran her fingers along the dado.

''There are seven lines of writing, and they run round the room,'' she said. ''Schiller pasted this dado on himself—a bit at a time—as fast as he was able to photograph Code 2. This is how the top line begins.

''To Raymond Viztelli,'' she read. ''Keep up pretense helping police; be frank, as I have told you. Tell them there is a secret panel, and you will be able to come often. Code begins: 'Abraham' means 'New guns have been fitted——' ''

Bland caught her hand and gently drew it away.

"If you want to be a nice live girl and dine with me tonight," he said half humorously, "do not pursue your investigations any farther."

That afternoon Bland did a little amateur paper-stripping and made a good job of it.

The Mediæval Mind

There can be no question that the D'Ortons were mediæval minded. Charles, the eldest of the brothers (he was once a doctor), had been twice submitted to the indignity of a police prosecution—once for beating a youthful robber of his orchards; once for an assault upon a serf of his who had expressed political views which were violently opposed to those held by his master. The Reverend Hubert, that hard-faced curate of souls, was in conflict with his evangelical bishop most of the time, and had created what were locally known as "scandals" by his treatment of parishioners; and Leslie D'Orton, youngest of the trio, had carried his mediævalism to such lengths that his effigy had been burnt by the enraged villagers of Badleigh-in-the-Moor.

They were men who sincerely hated the spirit of the time, though they were not averse from its conveniences. Electric light and motor cars, and expensive flats in Park Lane—all the advantages which are to be had by pushing buttons and turning switches were tolerable despite their modernity. They loathed the vulgar rich and despised the still more vulgar poor. Charles, white-haired and red-faced, had only French servants at his little palace near Saffron Wal-

den; the Reverend Hubert was the only parson in England who never went about without his walking footman.

It was the D'Ortons' misfortune that Jean Alys D'Orton was entirely devoid of the mediæval spirit. She was, it is true, only a half-sister, the relic of an unfortunate and indiscreet marriage contracted by their father, in his middle age, with one Mary Jean Potter, a very pretty lady, entirely without historical associations. She brought to the family no coat-armor, no lions couchant or leopards rampant; no more of heraldry indeed than was to be found inscribed on the six hundred thousand golden sovereigns which were hers (had she exchanged paper for metal) and which now should have been her daughter's. Miss Potter was literally the daughter of potters, rich Midland potters—but potters.

"I am common clay, Charles," said Jean, when he had remonstrated with her over some low escapade of her teens. "I have nothing that is Plantagenet in my system. When I wish to meet artists and dance with actors, my conscience doesn't prick me a little bit."

She was a slim, tall, pretty girl with yellowish ("clay-colored," said the Rev. Hubert) hair, and she had eyes like her mother's—big and dark and devastating.

That they had entirely devastated one susceptible man was the main reason why the three brothers sat at breakfast in Leslie D'Orton's flat one dull November morning. It was

something more than a meal: it was a board meeting of the Mediævalism Corporation. Something more serious than that even. There was a morning newspaper on the table, folded to display an alarming and a very inopportune column that had thrust itself into notice.

In a sense the news it contained struck at all the ancient privilege of class—those fine rights of acquisition and maintenance which established the castles of the Rhine and the strongholds of the *Komitadjis*.

"Very depressing," said Charles, and stroked his trim white moustache thoughtfully. "Deuced unpleasant."

"But these were trustees of a public company," insisted the Rev. Hubert. "I don't think it comes quite into the same category, Leslie? Are we not taking rather a fantastic view of—um—possibilities?"

The thin-faced young man with the deep-set eyes shook his head.

"My dear fellow, I'm a lawyer, or I'm supposed to be one. What is the use of deceiving ourselves?"

The Rev. Hubert picked up the paper again. The column which interested him was headed: "Seven Years for Faithless Trustees." He abominated the word "faithless."

"The responsibility for all this," he said soberly, "lies with that wretched Potter woman. It was a crime to leave the money in . . . as it were . . . after all, we have done our best."

"Let me put the matter plainly and a little brutally," said Leslie, as he pushed back from the table. "We three are the trustees of some £630,000. We have administered the money in a way which no court of law would countenance. If Jean marries the right kind of man—that is to say, if we could pick and choose her husband—there could be nothing to worry about. But Jean——!"

They were silent at this, being one in their despair of Jean and her erratic and vulgar predilections.

"You don't think this Mortiboy affair is serious?" asked Hubert.

"Mortimer," corrected Leslie. "Yes, I do. If he were the ordinary type of smug missioner, I shouldn't worry. The kind of fellow who runs an uplift mission in the East End is generally illiterate and usually common. But according to Jean, Mortimer is a Cambridge man, by no means pious, and more interested in teaching boys to box than saving their immortal souls."

"Diabolical!" said Hubert, with a grimace. "I preached a sermon on that very subject last Sunday——"

"We don't want sermons now, Hubert," said Charles testily. "Here is the point: we're in a devil of a mess if Jean decides to run away with this wretched youth. What is he like?"

They both looked at Leslie for information, but he shook his head.

"I haven't met him. Jean wanted to bring

him to dinner, but I put my foot down. The only thing I know about him is that he has beautiful eyes and a noble character, and that his handicap at golf is some ridiculous figure."

"Four," grunted Charles. "You told me that. I thought it was absurd. I can't understand how any man can keep his handicap at four if he wastes his time running sing-songs for the scum of Whitechapel. What is his profession?"

Leslie looked at him significantly.

"He is a lawyer," he said; "in the solicitors' branch, and that makes it worse."

Another long silence.

"How much of Jean's money is left?" asked Hubert.

The red-faced Charles coughed. He was the financial genius of the family.

"More than a half," he said loudly; "and I am perfectly certain that the Court would accept our explanation——"

"The Court would accept no explanation," said Leslie. "You can make up your mind on that subject. A hundred thousand pounds spent on a treasure-hunting expedition to Cocos Island is not what any Chancery judge would agree as a gilt-edged adventure."

"Tiggerly is honest enough," said Hubert. "A thoroughly reliable man. A little coarse of speech——"

"And a little mad," broke in Leslie. "He is coming up to see me tonight, by the way. He says he knows now where he made his mis-

take. . . . If we can finance another expedition . . ."

It was characteristic of the D'Ortons that such a statement was not received with derision. Rather was their attitude one of regret.

"How far has this affair gone?" asked Charles.

"The Mortimer affair?" Leslie bit his thin lower lip. "Very far, I should imagine. He wrote to me asking for a private interview. That means business. There is . . . how much left!"

"Nearly three hundred thousand," said Charles D'Orton. "Nearly . . . quite enough for any girl."

"Three — nearly," repeated the younger brother mechanically. "Now if we could arrange a marriage to anybody but this down-and-out adventurer . . ."

At that particular moment Jean Alys D'Orton was arranging a marriage with no other assistance than a rather good-looking young athlete could give to her.

She was walking slowly across Green Park, and the man who paced by her side had none of the appearance which is usually associated with a down-and-out adventurer.

"My dear," he was saying, "how can I meet these formidable brothers of yours?"

She smiled ruefully.

"There is going to be an awful row, Jack; they *won't* meet you! You don't know the heroic efforts I've made to get an audience of their majesties."

"Will you risk a cold in the head and sit down?" he asked. They were very near to the entrance of the park. "What is the real trouble? They can't object to me personally, because they don't know anything about me. They can't imagine that I'm a fortune-hunter, because I've money of my own. And if they took the trouble to inquire into the beginnings of my obscure family——"

She shook her head.

"My dear, they frighten me sometimes; they're mediæval." She turned round suddenly and faced him. "You've heard about the old barons who put their young sisters in a turret room and kept them there for years to keep their dowries? They're like that, Johnny. Don't laugh—I'm awfully serious. Fortunately, they haven't the turret room, but they have the turret mind."

"But what is it all about?" he asked, puzzled. "What is their objection? They don't want to keep you single all their lives? And is your dowry a tremendous amount?"

She evaded this question.

"Did you write to Leslie, as I asked?"

He nodded and felt in his pocket.

"I had a letter back from his secretary requesting me to refrain in future from addressing him. I nearly went round and kicked him."

"I wish you had," she said gloomily.

She was silent for a while, and then:

"It is to do with the dowry. I don't know how exactly——"

"Are they your trustees?" he asked quickly. "Your brothers, I mean?"

She nodded.

"When do you have control?"

"When I am twenty-five or when I am married," she answered, and he whistled.

"I wonder!"

Jack Mortimer knew a great deal more about the aristocratic D'Ortons than they imagined.

"Queer devils!" he said at last. "Are they by any chance your guardians in law? Can they prevent your marriage?"

She shook her head.

"Then what the dickens have we to worry about?" asked Jack Mortimer joyously.

Half an hour later she was passing to her room, when Leslie called her into his study. She shared the flat with her half-brother, but it was about the fourth time in the long years of their association that she had ever been invited into that handsome apartment.

"Charles has gone back to Devonshire," he said, without preliminary, "and he's awfully anxious about you, Jean—about your health, I mean. He wanted to know whether you would like to come down and spend a few weeks in the country."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Why?" she asked, and then: "Anyway, I couldn't possibly go." It needed a little courage to say, but she got the words out at last. "Leslie, I'm going to be married."

The hand that went up to his upper lip shook a little.

"Really? This is news. You realize you cannot get married without the consent of your guardians?"

"I have no guardians," she replied, so brusquely that his heart sank. Evidently she had been taking advice. At any rate he did not dispute this point.

"When is the interesting event to be?"

The actual date had never been discussed. She made up her mind quickly.

"In a fortnight," she said. "Just before Christmas. Mr. Mortimer and I are going away to Switzerland."

He scratched his chin, his dark eyes never leaving her face.

"This is very . . . unexpected," he said. "I am not so sure that Charles will approve."

Charles was the senior of the brothers, and theoretically the head of the house.

"And, Leslie"—she was nervous now, on delicate ground, and spoke hurriedly—"Jack—Mr. Mortimer said that when we returned from our honeymoon would be time for him to discuss . . . business with you . . . I mean, the question of my money. I told him I came into control on my marriage."

"That interested him, I am sure," said Leslie dryly; it was a tactical error on his part.

"Jack Mortimer has all the money that we shall ever require," she said coldly. "He has

an income of his own. If you do not wish him to discuss the matters, his lawyers——"

"There is no reason why he shouldn't discuss it," said Leslie abruptly, and then, with a nod, dismissed her. It was not an unusual method of parting.

Leslie got his elder brother on the phone just before he left his hotel for the country. Hubert was still in London. That afternoon there was a consultation, at the end of which Leslie went to Lincoln's Inn Fields and consulted a school-friend who was also a lawyer. The solicitor's face lengthened as he heard the frank recital.

"You're not serious?" he asked, when the young man had finished. "Because, if you are, you're in about as bad a position as you can possibly be."

"We've employed the money to the best of our ability——" began Leslie, but the lawyer stopped him.

"By your admission you've used enormous sums for your own personal benefit. You have in fact been living on your sister's capital for the past six years. If this went into Court, nothing could save you from penal servitude."

Leslie D'Orton's face went white.

"You mean that seriously?" The lawyer nodded.

"And of course this would affect also your two brothers. You've put yourselves in rather a tight place, my friend, and the only thing I can suggest is that you persuade your sister

to postpone her marriage. In other words, postpone your exposure."

Poor comfort was this to carry to his brethren. The three men met in Charles's sitting-room at Paddington, and three mediæval minds found one solution simultaneously.

"Jean mustn't marry," said the Rev. Hubert; "or if she marries, it must be a man of our finding."

They consulted through the hours that followed, and in the end, when Leslie D'Orton, stiff with sitting, rose and stretched himself, he had one comment to make which was both illuminating and truthful.

"Whichever way the thing goes, it means penal servitude for all of us."

The Rev. Hubert, least perturbed of the trio, offered the sententious observation that one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. Leslie got back to his flat to find a burly, middle-aged sea-captain waiting for him, and Captain Tiggerly was prepared to talk to the extent of his vocabulary on enormous treasures buried under landslides on Cocos Island.

Even by the lax standard of the sea, he was not a nice man. His earlier adventure in search of treasure had been hampered by a mutiny, which he had quelled single-handed; he narrowly escaped a charge of manslaughter in consequence. But he was an enthusiast.

"Here's the old sloop, ready for another go, my lord." (Invariably he addressed his bene-

factor by this title.) "I could take in all the stores I wanted in a week . . . she wants two new yards . . ."

"Can you find a crew?" asked Leslie.

The seaman grinned.

"Pick 'em up two a penny," he said. "I got a sort of crew now—I've been carrying cement——"

"Where are you lying?"

"In the Pool," said the captain quickly. "You can come over and see her if you like."

Leslie went into the hall and called the maid.

"No, sir," she replied. "Miss D'Orton went out to dinner. A gentleman called for her. He asked for you."

Leslie nodded, closed the door carefully behind him, and fastened the baize door, which further precluded all eavesdropping. Then he sat down at the table opposite the skipper.

"There's a man," he began, "named Mortimer. He runs a boys' club at Wapping . . ."

Nearly a month later there were peculiar happenings on the edge of Dartmoor. On the morning of the 23rd of December the inhabitants of the villages, within gunshot of Princetown, heard the boom of a cannon. That deep and awesome sound meant only one thing. Farmers called in their hired men to give instructions about the locking up of barns, the fastening of windows. Later, big cars loaded with policemen and warders came slowly through the mist that lay on the moor, stopped long enough

to tell of the escape of a convict serving a life sentence for murder, and passed on. The mist turned to rain, and a gale blew up from the Channel.

The night that followed was a desperate one for a man who, traveling only by night, was making his way to Exeter. He came in time to a high ridge of ground, felt for a flat-topped boulder, found one passably comfortable, and sat down to recover his breath. He was in excellent condition, but he had not eaten that day, and he had walked sixteen miles since sundown over a country which was largely foreign to him. And now it was very dark, and the road he had chosen was no more than a hillside track. He was wet through, naturally; it had not ceased raining since he made his escape. Almost he had forgotten what it felt like to be dry: "amphibian"—that was the word; he had been trying to think of it all day.

The rain soaked down and he was content. His left heel was blistered, he had torn both hands with brambles, and the little scratches were painful in a sharp, nagging kind of way. There had been compensations both for solitude and hardship: the fragrance of pine smoke trailing in the wind from a cottage chimney; the sound of a child's laughter that came through an open window just before a nurse or mother had closed it; the fairylike lights of a tiny village lying in the fold of the moor and seen from a high crag that jutted up from the hillside like a gaunt monolith.

He wished he had a cigar—one of those long, thin brown things that he loved to smoke. Or a pipe or a cigarette even. But wishes put weight on a man's feet and a new burden to his heart. He got up stiffly and went over the crest, descending gingerly and with great caution the steep slope on the other side.

He had an uncanny feeling that danger was very near at hand; that he was being spied upon, though the night was like ink. Once he imagined he had heard the ring of an iron-shod foot. . . .

The hill sloped steeply on his right, and he walked on the side of his feet most of the time. He could see nothing, hear nothing but the "tipple-tipple" of rain on rock. Far away to the north the low, scudding clouds were dyed salmon pink. A big town there, he thought—Exeter. Or maybe . . . no, it must be Exeter. And was it north or east? The wind helped him to determine. These storms blew in from the Atlantic—south-west. The glow in the sky was on his left front as he stood with his back to the weather. North.

He went farther down the track, and of a sudden it became smooth to his feet. A made road. He felt leftwards cautiously. A wire fence with cylindrical posts and concrete. And there was a shallow ditch. A farm or a house perhaps—then unexpectedly lights came into view. He must have rounded a shoulder of rock. A big house. He could see the glow of many windows.

The man called Tom Burt halted to take counsel with himself, and decided to push on. He had gone a dozen paces. . . .

"Hands up!"

The voice was harsh, inhuman. It was more like the bark of an infuriated crocodile.

"Don't you move or I'll put a dose of shot into your stummick. . . . Joe!"

He must have roared the word over his shoulder, for his voice sounded fainter.

Mr. Burt was startled alike by the command and by the astonishing fact that he could be seen by his invisible enemy.

"Joe . . . dam' ye!"

A shuffle of footsteps and a squeaky voice came from the darkness.

"Gotcher gun . . . see him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Shoot him if he don't do as I tell him. Walk, mister—straight ahead."

Burt obeyed.

Now he understood. His challenger was waist-high in a ditch, and the wayfarer had been visible against the gloomy skyline.

"Go on—right up to the house. I'm follerin' you. Don't let him out of your sight, Joe."

"No, sir," said the unseen youth.

Tom Burt was amused in a ghastly way (that was his own description), but he was puzzled too. The house was large, and, as he had seen, three of the rooms were brightly illuminated. There was a white-pillared portico before the

door, and under this were two powerful lamps that threw an oblong of light on the yellow-graveled ground.

The door was open and he had sight of a broad, paneled hall; a red fire burnt on an open hearth. The masks of a dozen foxes stared stonily from the walls. He saw a rack of hunting-crops, and behind the glass window of a cabinet, a dozen guns.

"Stop where you are now and turn round. Joe, shut that door!"

Burt swung round.

He had guessed his captor was old; there was no surprise here. He was picturesque with his white beard and bald head shining with moisture. Dark, menacing eyes glared from under the bushy white eyebrows; how he might be dressed was a matter for conjecture—he wore a dark weatherproof that reached to his heels. The long-barrelled army revolver in his hand did not waver as did the shot-gun in the hands of the boy. The youth's teeth were chattering, the eyes in the pale face were scared and fearful. He started the door closing with his foot, and backed up to it until with a bend of his spare body he closed it with a crash.

"Just you wait here: this boy'll kill you sure as God if you move!"

The old man slouched past him. Burt heard the sound of a door open and close. There was a long mirror in the hall and he was standing opposite, he found, when he turned his head.

A ludicrous sight! His sodden overcoat clung to his legs, the brim of his sou'-wester dropped dismally over his ears. He was terribly unshaven, and when he smiled he was hideous.

"A merry Christmas!" he said, and bowed to himself.

The youth breathed heavily.

"Don't you go movin' about, mister!" he warned.

Burt grinned at himself again for the joy of experiencing his own ugliness.

"Be of good heart, my child," he said, and the snub nose of the youth wrinkled in embarrassment.

A door opened behind the prisoner.

"Come on!"

Mr. Burt turned and walked through the open door. He was in a large hall with a high raftered ceiling. Before the stone fireplace two men were standing. One, the younger, was in evening dress; the elder wore a faded golf suit. He was very stout, red-faced, and white-haired, and his eyes protruded like a pug dog's. His companion, a thin-faced man with a black smear of moustache, stood with his back to the fire, his hands behind him.

"Good evening," he said, with ironical politeness. "I hope you have enjoyed your walk?"

"The air was good," replied Burt, "the scenery, I have no doubt, was excellent, but the feeding was exceedingly poor."

The elder of the two turned to the old man.

"Get him some food," he said gruffly.

A little clock ticked musically in some part of the room, and this, and the falling of a log in the fireplace, were the only sounds that disturbed the interval of silence between the old man's departure and his return with a tray.

"All right—leave it, Gald," nodded the younger man, and when the door had closed on the ancient: "Eat, my friend——"

"And drink," suggested Mr. Burt as he sat down at the table, "and, in view of the festive season, be merry? Tell me that tomorrow I die and I shall call you a liar."

"Damn cheek," growled the red-faced man, but his companion silenced him with a look.

The wanderer was very hungry, but he was also very sane. He did not eat ravenously, but slowly, and was still hungry when he pushed back his plate and drained the long glass of beer.

"A full man is a dull man," he said. "Would you of your charity supply me with a cigarette?"

The younger of the two offered a gold case and his unwilling guest took and lit a cigarette.

"Now," he said, "produce your dénouement!"

"Who are you?" asked the younger man.

"Haroun al Raschid," smiled Burt. "A prince in disguise wandering about the earth to learn at first hand of the lives and trials of his people."

"You're the man who escaped from Dartmoor Prison last night"—the young man spoke with great deliberation and care. "I haven't had time to discover your name, but I don't think that matters for the moment. Are you married?"

There was an amused glint in Burt's eyes as he shook his head.

"Would you be willing to marry a lady for five thousand pounds and an aeroplane trip to safety?"

"And a new and dry suit of clothes," suggested Burt; "and by clothes I include such indelicacies as underwear."

"Why argue with him?" exploded the red-faced gentleman. "Tell him he's got to do it; tell him you'll hand him over to the police an' all that. Damn it all, Leslie . . ."

"Be quiet, Charles, please," said Leslie O'Orton. "Let me manage in my own way——"

"Excuse me." Mr. Burt was pardonably intrigued. "Marriages are much easier arranged in heaven than performed on earth. There are certan time-wasting preliminaries, banns, special licences, and so forth, are there not? I hate to suggest——"

"That is arranged," said Leslie.

He walked up and down the broad strip of carpet before the fireplace, his hands behind him.

"I am going to take you into my confidence . . . by the way, you are a convicted murderer? A life prisoner?"

"Is it necessary to call me names?" asked the other.

"It isn't, of course. You seem to have been a gentleman. That will make things easier. I have—we have a sister. It is not necessary to tell you the kind of foolish trouble she has got into. It is necessary that she should be married. You were our choice from the moment we heard of your escape."

"I am flattered." Mr. Burt showed his teeth in a smile.

"We have been looking for you all day: by the greatest of good luck we heard through the police that you were heading this way. My old groom found you without having the least idea as to our plans."

"Pardon me: is your sister a willing agent in the matter?"

Charles grunted something.

"That is neither here nor there," said Leslie. "There is another man, of course: he is at the moment on a sailing ship bound for the Pacific. You need not consider him."

He saw the eyes of the man open wider.

"Good God! You shanghaied him!"

Leslie smiled.

"That is beside the point. Are you prepared to marry this lady?"

"But I understand that by the laws of the country——" began Mr. Burt.

"A marriage is only legal when performed within certain hours. We have a special license

dispensing with that formality. Are you agreeable? If so, my brother's car is waiting to take you to London. You need have no fear about detection: we have taken the most elaborate precautions—we believe in miracles and we anticipated the miracle of your arrival. Do you agree?"

Mr. Burt nodded.

"It is all one to me," he said. "The mystery of it appeals to me."

Leslie went out of the hall and made his way upstairs. There was no turret tower in Charles D'Orton's Devonshire house, but there was an attic chamber which served the purpose. No weak maiden wrung her hands or wept in this lumber room. The girl who sat glowering at the Reverend Hubert was neither subdued nor tearful.

". . . it is only because I think you are all mad that I listen to you," she was saying when Leslie entered the room. "You can't imagine that I shall overlook this . . ."

She looked up at Leslie.

"Have you found my ideal husband?" she demanded, her eyes hard with anger.

To her surprise he nodded.

"You have to be sensible, Jean. This man Mortimer was not the man for you. As I have told you, he was already married——"

"Why did you send a wire in his name saying he was here and wanted to see me?" she asked furiously. "If any harm has come to Jack Mor-

timer I will never rest until I have put you in prison. Mediæval? You're prehistoric, Leslie . . . mad. And as to this man you've got, you can send him away. Or I'll tell him——"

"He knows," said Leslie, and his gravity almost sent her into a fit of hysterical laughter. "As soon as you are married he will leave you," said Leslie, who did all the talking. "We are doing this for your own good, Jean, to protect you against fortune-hunters. In a few years' time you can divorce this man——"

"I'll not marry him—can I see him?" she asked suddenly.

"Please remember, Jean——" began the Reverend Hubert in his most ponderous tone.

But she had followed her half-brother from the room. For three days she had paced this little attic room, trying to wrest reality from a situation so fantastic that she could not believe she was waking. She had her moments of panic, too. . . .

She almost ran into the hall. Her husband-designate was sitting at the end of the long table, a second glass of beer before him.

"Is this the lady?" he asked.

"This is the lady," said Leslie.

"She is not favorably impressed by me," said Tom Burt, "and I can hardly blame her."

At the sight of the scarecrow the girl's face had gone the color of chalk. The man rose and bowed.

"In happier times, madame, I was better look-

ing." He turned to Leslie. "Do you anticipate any very strong objection on the part of the lady? I ask because, as you probably know if you have studied my career of crime, I am someing of a hypnotist! For example . . .!"

He snapped his fingers in the air, and the girl stared at him.

"What the devil——" began the unimaginative Charles.

"This lady is now completely under control," said Mr. Burt calmly. "Ask her to do anything you wish and she will do it."

Leslie looked from one to the other in amazement.

"Will you marry this man?" he asked.

To his astonishment she nodded.

"Yes," she said dully.

Charles stared open-mouthed as the Reverend Hubert stumbled and blundered through the ancient ritual. Certain provisions had not been made. . . . Jean Alys D'Orton was married with Leslie's signet ring.

He left her sitting limply in a chair, staring at her husband, and hurried to the telephone in his study.

"Is that the police station? . . . I am Mr. D'Orton. I have the man you want at my house —the escaped convict——"

"At your house, Mr. D'Orton?" was the surprising reply. "He was caught at Newton Abbot five hours ago!"

Leslie's jaw dropped.

"You mean Burt . . .?"

"No, sir, Collwood——"

Leslie flew back to the hall. The scarecrow was standing behind the girl's chair.

"What's your name?" he asked breathlessly.

Mr. Burt smiled.

"I have several. When old man Tiggerly got me aboard his dirty little ship he called me Tom Burt—when I jumped overboard off Teignmouth he called me several things that are unprintable. I heard him, because the boat in which he and his son followed me to shore was less than a dozen yards away when I got to land. He chased me on to the moor: if I hadn't gone to sleep and lost myself you would have been in prison hours ago. My real name, by the way is Mortimer—if there is anything in the marriage, that is your sister's name too!"

. . . . . .

Charles did not refer to that dreadful night until the train was running along the Lake of Geneva a few days later. They were bound for Italy. Hubert followed as soon as he had disposed of his living—Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer were very reasonable.

"That hypnotism business . . . by Gad . . . to keep her quiet . . . we'd have smelt a rat if she'd jumped at him. By Gad, that's a lovely old building!" He pointed to the Château Chillon, which is undoubtedly mediæval.

The Know-How

"What you need, Dian, is a little of my know-how in those pretty legs of yours."

That was almost a daily saying of Alana Vane.

Dian's legs were indubitably pretty—theatrical gossip writers used to call them "shapely." Johnny Crewe objected, very naturally, to any reference to them at all.

Otherwise, he was rather sensible, approved her stage career, had an implicit and unshakeable faith in her ultimate success, and longed for its coming.

He could have married right away—he was a very well-off young man, even in the days of Alana. But—Dian must have her chance. Marriage would mean the breakdown of the "position" she had built with such labor, and the shutting of the door which seemed at the point of yielding.

Alana used to sigh at this talk of marriage. She was very beautiful in her way. Dian Donald did not know her in the days before she began to look sad, and the straight lines deepen on each side of her face: to Dian she was always

the most lovely woman in the world, and the public thought so too. The Elcho Theatre was never without its queues. She had saved more bad plays and given value to more valueless music than any woman on the stage. Her personality was electric, her voice glorious. She was one of the few musical comedy actresses that could act. Few spoke of her by her surname —she was "Alana," and so her name appeared on poster and programme.

She was Dian's height and Dian's build, and on the stage had something of Dian's childlike loveliness.

"Marriage! Humph!" She sighed, and shook her head. "It's fine and it's heart-breaking. You're better off, Dian, as a single understudy than as a married star. And you're a good understudy, darling. The world's best. If you had the sense of a rabbit, you'd take the small parts Dowall offers you and get away from me. A little know-how, and your name would be in lights, and you'd be drawing down three hundred pounds a week instead of six."

"Miss Forsyant is 'off' tonight," said Dian.

Alana nodded.

"I know—she's dining with Freddie. He said he was going to his club to meet a man, but he's dining with Elsa. I suppose it's all right. But it's hard not to tell him I know."

Freddie was big and florid, and notoriously gallant. He had been an assistant stage director when Alana found him in a third-class show that

she had made into a first-class show. His salary had been about on a level with Dian's. And then Alana fell in love, and they were married; and after that, Freddie did no more work: only took people out to dinner—chorus girls at first, and then principals, and then the lovely Elsa, who was blue-eyed and calculating. All this happened before the big break, and it was like Alana that she should play to the very last night of the show, should come smiling to the footlights and make her little speech before the curtain fell, never to rise upon her again.

She divorced Freddie, and vanished from London. Dian, who wept very little, wept much that night when she took farewell of her friend.

"I'm going to New York: I may come back next year. I've asked Dowall to give you some sort of a part. I'll give you absent treatment for know-how, darling! And, Dian . . . Elsa's got a lot of money. I didn't know that until I found Freddie was negotiating for the lease of the Elcho. You may find her difficult, but stick it out—fame in a night for you, my dear; you know the stories of the understudies!"

That was Alana's last joke. The understudy who rises to fame in a night was one of her favorite gibes at the story-tellers, for she knew that such things do not happen.

So passed Alana. So came Elsa Forsyant and a new type of performance. There was a failure and another failure, and then a half-success. Freddie, the florid, began to grow streaky lines

round his china-blue eyes—Dowall, the old director, grinned sardonically.

"It's the type of show that's wrong," insisted Freddie. "Let's get back the Alana kind."

"Where's your Alana?" sneered Dowall.

"Elsa could do it on her head."

Freddie said this defiantly. Mr. Dowall made audible sounds of derision.

"It's on her feet she's got to do it," he said; "and those kinds of show cost money."

This significantly: he had a pretty shrewd idea that the financial position of Freddie and his new wife was not very sound.

"You get the show together. I'll find the money."

He might speak with confidence, but he had certain inward doubts. The theatre was a heavy responsibility. The first two shows had been financed by himself; for the rest he secured backing, and he had exhausted that source of revenue in his one effort. Still, suckers were born at the rate of one a minute.

So *Great Heart* was born, but the particular sucker that Freddie sought did not attach itself to his clumsily baited hook, until one day he met a most agreeable young man waiting at the stage door to escort a member of the company to dinner. . . .

The rehearsals of *Great Heart* remained a bad memory to those who took part in them. The "book" was bad, the music was in the main

written by a surprising young aristocrat. Dowall said openly that Freddie had been paid a considerable sum by the composer for the opportunity. The hard-working chorus alone were efficient. Elsa insisted upon her lines being altered again and again—she was not very strong on her "h's"—and shamelessly took to herself not only the best lines but the best songs in the play. She would have no other pretty girl in the play. She must be alone, incomparable. She changed the leading man twice—once because he was so tall that he made her look short, once because his voice was so good that it drowned her own rather feeble notes.

Sometimes she did not come to rehearsal for days....

"I read the part," said Dian, snatching a hasty tea with Johnny in the Palm Court of the Carlton. "Oh, Johnny! It is terrible at the theatre! Mr. Dowall just sits in the stalls and glowers. And Freddie doesn't seem to care much. He was worried last week, but now he doesn't trouble to come to rehearsals."

John Crewe moved uneasily in his chair. He was a fresh-faced and youthful-looking man of thirty.

"Oh, really!" he said awkwardly. "He seemed very cheerful about it all when I lunched with him on Monday."

She looked at him incredulously.

"You lunched with Freddie? You didn't tell me! I didn't know that you had met him."

listen to nothin'—you just stand about and chatter like a lot of old crows . . . and we open tomorrow! No—tonight! All right—you can all go home. Tonight I want everybody in the theatre at 5:30: chorus, principals, everybody. We open, and God help us! If we postponed we'd be worse! A'right!"

He waved the company to the devil—they melted noisily.

He called his familiar to him.

"Not a costume that fits, half the shoes haven't arrived, the orchestra's a crime, and the stage hands the biggest bunch of left-handed bimbos I've seen since I left the fit-ups. Fit-ups! Gawd, they'd give points to this mob! Twenty-five minutes changing one set! There'll be a riot in the theatre tonight!"

Mr. Dowall was a gloomy man, with a deeply lined face. His scowl was permanent.

Two girls came towards him along the narrow space between the orchestra and Row A. Elsa came boldly, with the air and manner of a proprietress, a small, supple lady, expensively perfumed, her hands glittering.

"Listen, Dowall, I can't open tonight. I've got no voice, and I'm simply a bundle of nerves."

Dian, the understudy, would gladly have missed the interview, but she had been commanded to appear.

Mr. Dowall looked at the leading lady steadily. She was pretty: even her worst enemy could

not deny the loveliness of regular features and faultless complexion. Her figure was sometimes described by ecstatic paragraphists as divine—Mr. Dowall would concede that also.

But he, of all men, knew the shrew behind those deep blue eyes, knew something of the meanness of her soul, and of those red lips of hers—anyway, she had got her Freddie, and that was the end of it; and Alana Vane was somewhere in the Western States of America—picture-making, people said vaguely; breaking her heart, her friends were certain. And there was Freddie, in the back row of the stalls, curled up and faintly snoring. What anybody could see in Freddie—Mr. Dowall shook a weary head.

"You're a bundle of nerves and you're not all you might be, Elsa, and you've got a doctor's certificate tucked away in your stocking, and the show opens tonight."

He stated the facts calmly.

"What do you propose we shall do? Postpone for a month, and bring the company down to Monte Carlo to give you a chance of rehearsing under favorable conditions——"

"You needn't be sarcastic at my expense, Dowall." Her voice rose a note.

"Shall I tell you something?"

The grim-faced producer put his thumbs in his armholes and looked up at her.

"If you were Alana I'd be foaming at the mouth and rolling on the floor. Alana matters. You don't matter two rows of pins. You've got

a part in the play and you'll just fill it: you'll dance well and sing reasonably; your fans will say 'Isn't she wonderful?' and the people who don't like you will say they like you better when you're doing something else. The play's a flop that you couldn't save. She could. When your husband changed his wife, he lost the best leading woman in the world."

She was livid with fury.

Dowall listened, and yet didn't listen. Dian crept away unnoticed.

"You . . . you're fired! You don't know how to produce a show! It's your incompetence . . ."

"Say it with flowers!" snarled Mr. Dowall.

Freddie was waiting for her in a decidedly cheerful and conciliatory frame of mind. He listened without any comment to her shrill tirade. . . .

"He insulted me, and you sat there snoring like a pig! I wonder I didn't smack his face. . . . You'll fire Dowall at once, Freddie!"

To her surprise, Freddie chuckled.

"He will be crushed in the general *débâcle,*" he said.

She snapped at him.

"For God's sake don't use foreign words to me! I know that you're better educated than I am. What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm taking no further risks with the Elcho. I've sublet the theatre and I've sold the production."

She switched on the light of the car to see him better.

"You've sold the production."

"Lock, stock, and barrel; hook, line, and sinker!" he said, almost gaily. "The bare cost of the production is eight thousand—I had a banker's draft for twelve this afternoon—and the only contract is an exchange of letters."

There was another spectator of the final scenes at the rehearsal. John Crewe sat in the center of the deserted dress-circle, his coat pulled up over his ears, and watched with increasing gloom chaos succeed chaos. He was a witness, too, of the little scene between Elsa and Mr. Dowall, and when the girl went back to the stage and he saw Dowall follow, he rose stiffly, and, making his way down a dark staircase, passed through a little iron door on to the stage. Dowall had just finished speaking to the understudy, and on Dian's face was a look of despair.

He helped her into her coat and they walked up the street towards an all-night restaurant.

"We'll both feel better after we have had something to eat," he said, with an assumption of cheerfulness that he did not feel. "Your Elsa is rather a termagant, and I didn't like her at all in the show; but I suppose tomorrow—tonight she'll be better."

"She isn't playing tonight," wailed Dian. "Oh, Johnny, I've got to appear! Isn't it ghastly?"

He wasn't so shocked at this as he might have been.

"By Jove, that's good news! You're certain to be better than she. What's the matter with her?"

Dian shook her head.

"I thought it was bad temper and that she would appear, but Mr. Dowall is certain she won't. She wants people to believe that the play has failed because, owing to illness, she could not make her appearance. And it will fail, Johnny. Mr. Dowall is the best prophet I know, and he says that failure is inevitable."

Johnny stopped dead in his stride.

"The devil he did! That's bad news to me."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," she said, ignorant of the cause of his perturbation. "Anyway, I'm giving up the stage. What Alana said was true —the story of the understudy who leaps to fame in a night is all moonshine. I shan't either leap there or walk there or even crawl there." And then she saw his face and her heart sank. "What is the matter?"

"Let us eat first," he said ruefully.

They went into the warm, well-lighted saloon of the restaurant and ordered coffee and fried eggs; and the food was very comforting.

"Now," he said, as he lit a cigarette, "I am going to tell you how many sizes of fool I am. That show belongs to me."

She stared at him in bewilderment.

"I bought it," he said grimly. "Mr. Fred Vane told me the tale so effectively that I have

not only bought the show but I have taken a lease of the theatre."

"Oh, Johnny!" she gasped. "You never have! My dear, you'll lose every penny—how wicked of him! But you can get your money back if she doesn't appear. You must have stipulated for her——"

"I stipulated for nothing: I didn't even have a contract with him. It was one of those clever exchanges of letters to save lawyers' fees." And then he laughed. "You needn't worry your little head about it. I don't want to lose twelve thousand pounds, and have in addition the liability of the theatre on my hands, but it won't absolutely break me, though it will make a big hole in my reserves."

He took her home and left her, almost in tears, at her Bloomsbury lodging; then he went back in time to intercept the brain-weary Mr. Dowall just as he was leaving the theatre.

Dowall listened scowlingly and shook his head.

"You're the sucker, are you? I was wondering who it was. Making this show go will be as easy as selling ice-cream to Eskimos. There's only one person in the world who could save it, and that's Alana."

"She's not in England."

Dowall shook his head.

"No; she was in New York when I heard of her last. Anyway, she couldn't rehearse it in time, and that's that. You've got to face the

certainty of losing your money, just as I've got to face the certainty of losing my job. That doesn't worry me much, because I've been praying for the end of my contract. Alana . . .!" He shook his head and sighed. "There's one chance in eight with Alana, but with nobody else!"

John agreed unhappily.

In her dressing-room sat Dian, numbed and panic-stricken. She was dressed for the first act, had been "made-up" and dressed for an hour.

She gazed hopelessly at inevitable failure. The play was bad, the music, the production, everything. To have made her appearance in the middle of a successful run . . . that would have given her a chance.

She looked round the resplendent dressing-room—it was Elsa's—and shivered.

The play might run a week—a month perhaps; and it was Johnny's. Failure might not ruin him, but it would hurt him badly. This added responsibility was disastrous.

The telephone bell tinkled.

She took up the instrument, thinking it was Johnny, and heard the stage doorkeeper:

"It's some sort of trunk call—I can't get it quite, miss. Will you hang on?"

She waited: in her ear were strange splutterings and whinings. Distant voices spoke incomprehensibly. Some one near at hand said. . . . "Clear now to your call. . . ."

And the noises died, and she heard a gentle voice:

"Is that you, honey?"

It was Alana's! She would have known it anywhere.

"Alana! How wonderful! Are you in London?"

Alana's soft, gurgling voice came to her.

"No, honey—I'm in New York. I read you were opening tonight, so I thought I'd call you. . . ."

There was a long pause.

"It's all right—I guess I'm not too well . . . speaking from bed, Dian—they didn't want me to talk, these doctors . . . but, you know, honey . . . wanted to wish you luck and the 'know-how'. . . . You forget yourself, kid . . . just forget yourself. . . . I'll be right along wishing for you . . . just forget you're Dian . . . and remember that I'm with you. . . ."

The voice stopped: Dian thought she heard a woman's voice say something sharply, and then there was a click, and a man said, "Call to New York finished."

For half an hour Dian sat looking straight ahead of her. The call boy knocked at the door, and bellowed her name; and she rose and went out with a feeling that it was not she who walked so light-heartedly along the dim passage that led to the stage.

Johnny did not reach the theatre till nearly eight o'clock, just before the curtain rose, and he was staggered to find the best box occupied by Freddie. At least he might have had the decency to keep away that night!

The programme had been "slipped" with the information that, owing to severe indisposition, Miss Elsa Forsyant would not make her appearance; and with this as a text, John Crewe made his way to Freddie's box in an endeavor to save something from the wreckage.

Freddie listened with half-closed eyes.

"Sorry, old man, but when I sold you the production I didn't undertake that Miss Forsyant should appear. She's terribly ill . . . the doctor thinks it's a complete nervous breakdown and has ordered her away to the Riviera. But the show's all right: don't let old Dowall rattle you. And that young lady of yours is going to make a big hit, believe me."

He slapped Johnny on the back, and John Crewe had to exercise a great deal of self-restraint to prevent himself slapping back.

He had hardly reached his seat when the curtain rose.

The opening was weak. The best producer in the world could have done nothing with the aristocrat's music. There was a stir in the theatre; the gallery began to cough. Mr. Jevons, the conductor, a nervous man, mopped his wet brow and communicated his nervousness to the orchestra. The first comedy scene was painfully unfunny. Johnny writhed in his seat. And then, with a burst of music—all the good numbers in the show had been imported for Elsa's benefit—there came—Alana.

There was no doubt about it at all. For a moment the big house gasped, and then, as it recognized its favorite, it rose and roared. She was a little taken aback by the reception, smiled nervously, bowed, and began her number.

It was Alana, with all her vivacity, all her cleverness, all the tricks of hands and head: Alana's voice, Alana's twinkling feet. Again and again they called her back.

Crewe looked across to the box where Freddie was sitting. His face was white, his mouth wide open. He sat like a man stricken dumb. In some mysterious way the play had gathered itself together, as though the very presence of the great star added some galvanic quality to its composition which it had not possessed until she came on to the stage.

The first act passed like a flash. Again came Alana; again she sang and danced; again her drawling voice electrified her lovers. John saw them picking up the little slips from the floor and scanning them. Who was Dian Donald? Was it a new name by which Alana desired to be known? Had she been reconciled to her husband . . .?

The curtain fell, rose again, fell again, rose . . . On the tenth curtain the house lights were switched on.

John was passing the box on his way to the door leading to the stage when Freddie appeared, dishevelled and shaken.

"Alana!" he squeaked. "When did she come

back? . . . My God! It gave me a shock! Never had anything like it. . . ."

But John was already pushing open the steel door, and in a few seconds was on the stage. He made his way through the electrified stage hands, down a flight of stairs, and knocked at the door of Dian's dressing-room. She opened it herself, and to his amazement she wore the same costume that Alana had worn.

"How was I?" she asked.

She was trembling; her voice shook. He gaped at her.

"You? Wasn't it Alana?"

She laughed, a little hysterically.

"Of course it wasn't, you silly booby! Didn't they give me a wonderful reception? Johnny, I've got the know-how. You remember Alana said I would one day? She's been on the phone to me tonight—it was wonderful!"

He was silent, did not interrupt her when she began to speak rapidly about the possibility of the play being a success.

"The second act is the best. Even Mr. Dowall says so."

"Where is Dowall?" he asked quickly.

Dowall was in his office, a tiny cupboard of a place opening from the stage. John hurried back to find him sitting at his table, his head upon his hands.

"Well?"

The old producer looked up.

"Beats me to blazes. You might have thought

she was Alana . . . the same technique. Did you notice that three-step movement of hers? Only Alana could do that. By gosh, she's a riot! All the stage hands say she's as good as Alana at her best."

He stabbed John's shirt-front with his blunt forefinger.

"You've got a chance with this show—just a chance. I never thought they'd take to that girl — by gosh, what talent! And nobody guessed. . . ."

John saw the second act through as in a dream. The comedy which he had thought dull took on an unexpected sparkle. The chorus, which had been a ragged line of bored girls singing flatly, became a mechanically perfect entity, radiantly lovely, rhythmic of movement. And Dian went from triumph to triumph. One little song of the aristocratic composer which Elsa had committed herself to sing was the biggest hit of the show. The management had not even troubled to "plug" it, being only too anxious to have it over and forgotten.

John heard people speaking around him.

"It's Alana . . . it isn't Alana but it's very much like her . . . she's better than Alana . . ."

And every now and again he saw somebody in the audience consulting that little slip which told of Miss Elsa Forsyant's indisposition and the understudy's appearance.

The curtain fell at last. Johnny could not believe that the play was over. He met a dramatic critic hurrying forth putting on his coat.

"Great show . . . new Alana . . . this is a bit of luck for Freddie Vane."

When he reached the stage, Dian was the center of an excited group of chorus girls, and he had to push his way to her side.

"Isn't it wonderful, wonderful?" she breathed. "Oh, darling, I'm so glad, for your sake! Everybody's been so sweet——"

"You're not Alana!"

The voice was shrill. Nobody would have recognized it as Freddie's. He was like a drunken man, shaking from head to foot, his under lip quivering, his eyes wide open.

"You're not Alana . . . everybody thinks you're Alana . . ."

And then he began to laugh hysterically. Possibly he had been drinking. Some stage hands took him back to his box, helped him on with his coat, and put him in a cab.

"Let's stay up until the newspapers come out. . . . I want to see the notices," Dian begged, and Johnny humored her; took her and two of the company to his private room in the hotel, before he sent a messenger to Fleet Street to collect the early morning editions.

He opened the first of these, saw a headline and gasped:

"Tragic Coincidence"

and the first paragraph ran:

> "Whilst the new Alana, Miss Dian Donald, scored a most amazing individual tri-

umph in *Great Heart* at the Elcho Theatre last night, at the very moment of her appearance, when even the most experienced members of the audience mistook her for the great star of a few years ago, the real Alana Vane died, whilst she was in the act of talking on the wireless phone to Miss Dian Donald from her sick-bed . . .''

''Was it a good notice?'' asked Dian anxiously.

''Very,'' said Johnny, as he folded up the paper. ''But I think we'd better read these when we're alone.''

Christmas Eve at the China Dog

Inventors are proverbially consecrated amongst the gods. Tam M'Tavish recalled the proverb and grinned at the reeking pot which bubbled and frothed above a gas burner.

It was a large iron pot, and he had first qualified for his consecration by extemporizing from the tubes of an ancient bicycle a tripod from which his boiler was suspended.

The draughty little barn which housed the home-scientist was a discarded army hut of iron, and its few contents were of a character which would not burn. Moreover the boiling mess, which from time to time he stirred with an iron rod, was itself non-inflammable. The smell of it poisoned the adjoining fields and penetrated to the village a mile away, but Tam, in the ecstasy of invention, sniffed nothing amiss.

The tap of a stick's iron ferrule against the door roused him from his rapt contemplation of the cauldron. The little man rose reluctantly, stooping to turn down the flame of the burner, opened the door and stepped out into the light.

At first he thought the caller was a complete stranger. A glimpse of the car's bonnet on the road at the end of the garden explained how the visitor had come.

"Why, Tam," said the stranger, "you're just as skinny and ugly as you always were!"

Tam's eyes narrowed.

"It's not Mr. Merrick?" he said in genuine astonishment. "Why, Mr. Merrick, sir, you have changed."

In the days of the war, Merrick had been one of the brightest and most resourceful of the fighting airmen, and Tam spoke no more than the truth when he said that his erstwhile comrade had changed. It was not a change for the better. Sudden prosperity had not agreed with Walter Merrick: it had made him unhealthily plump, and had brought tiny sacks under his eyes, and an unwholesome color to the skin which Tam remembered used to be like the skin of a girl.

"Changed, have I?" said the other carelessly. "Well, you haven't. What are you doing in there, Tam?"

"It's a wee invention of mine," said Tam solemnly. "A new dope, Mr. Merrick. 'Tis fireproof and waterproof, and I ha' me doots that I'll be making me fortune one of these days."

"You're married, aren't you?" said Merrick, as he walked towards the house, with the shirtsleeved Tam at his elbow.

"Aye," said Tam, with that habitual caution

which made him admit even such important facts as his marriage with an air of reservation, "but ma lady is awa'—in America. She's American," explained Tam, "and her folks wanted to see the wee bairn."

"So you're a grass widower—h'm, that's awkward."

Mr. Merrick looked round the cozy sitting-room into which Tam had ushered him without any evidence of approval.

"Why do you live out in this God-forsaken part of the world—I suppose it is handy for your air taxi—I saw your advertisement in *The Times* the other day. What is the bus like?"

"She's like all the buses you ever knew, Mr. Merrick, sir," said Tam. He was wondering why the absence of his wife should be described as "awkward." "She has the engine of a bomber and the wings of a scout. I bought bits of her from the disposal board, and I assembled them mysel'. You're not wanting a ride, Mr. Merrick?"

His eyes twinkled mischievously.

"A ride? Good lord, no," said Mr. Merrick. "I haven't the nerve for it now, Tam; I think I must be getting old."

"Maybe your nerves are losing their confidence in ye," said Tam quietly.

Merrick had seated himself in a chair by the window and was looking around restlessly.

"My nerves are gone, that's a fact," he admitted. "I wouldn't dare trust myself with a joy-stick now, though I don't suppose I'd be

afraid to go as a passenger, especially if you were the pilot, Tam."

"Any testimonial you'd like to give to me would you kindly put into writing, Mr. Merrick? I'm making a collection of them."

There was an awkward pause. The visitor had certainly not yet revealed his business, and Tam was curious to hear.

Presently the object of his visit was exposed.

"Tam," he said suddenly, "I'm wondering how you're fixed for money. Would you like a five hundred pound job?"

"Five hundred a year or five hundred a week?" asked Tam.

"Five hundred pounds for a few days' work," said Mr. Merrick impressively.

He rose from his chair and paced up and down the room.

"I'll tell you what it is all about, Tam," he said, "and you'll understand that I am putting myself rather in your power. It's about a girl."

"Aye," said Tam quietly, "I was thinking it was, Mr. Merrick, sir."

"She's very unhappy," said Mr. Merrick, who was no story-teller, and left many gaps to be filled in by his hearer. "The fact is, Tam, she's married to a fellow who doesn't appreciate her."

"I've read of such cases," said Tam. "Ye have to get married before ye get thoroughly unappreciated."

"But I'm fond of her," said Mr. Merrick doggedly, "and she's fond of me. I'm a pretty

rich man, Tam. I came into all my uncle's money after the war, and I can give her the time she wants, but I don't want to get mixed up in this business, you see."

"Do ye want her to get mixed up in it?" asked Tam dryly.

"That's different," said Mr. Merrick, with a wave of his hand. "She's going to run away from him anyway. He's as poor as a church mouse, and naturally a girl who likes life and pleasure, theatre parties, Tam, and all that sort of thing . . . she's just fretting her heart out."

"Puir lassie," said Tam, without any great display of sympathy. "Maybe she's never tried the cecnema pictures? They're verra interesting, Mr. Merrick."

"Don't be a fool," said the other rudely. "Pictures! What the devil does she want to go to pictures for, when she can have the time of her life? However, I don't want to discuss that matter. Would you bring her over to Paris and bring her back again at the end of a week and"—he hesitated—"well," he blurted out at last, "you're married and nobody knows your wife isn't here. Suppose any inquiries were made, would you say that she'd been staying . . ." he ended a little breathlessly, for he had seen the queer, hard look in Tam's eyes. "It is all square and above board," he added hastily. "Platonic friendship, you know, Tam. She will come with a chaperone, and all that sort of thing, and it's worth five hundred."

"Maybe it is worth five thousand," said Tam quietly, "but not to me, Mr. Merrick. I believe in making the course of love run smooth, but I've no experience with Platonic friendship. And noo, Mr. Merrick, we'll talk about other things. Why, I haven't seen you since Mr. Selby's wedding. He's a grand young fellow, that friend of yours, Mr. Merrick. I mind the day he brought doon six of our late enemy."

Merrick, who had resumed his chair, shifted round uncomfortably and swallowed something.

"A guy fine man," said Tam emphatically, "and a verra fine lady he married, Mr. Merrick. Wi' all that grand golden hair and eyes like blue saucers. Have ye seen him lately?"

"Oh yes," said Merrick indifferently, "I see them occasionally. She often speaks about you," he said, and Tam thought he spoke meaningly.

"Aboot me," he said in surprise. "And I did na' think she ever saw me; I was eating all the time I was there."

"She likes you, Tam," said Merrick, "and she trusts you. She only said the other day, 'I'm sure Tam would do anything for me.'"

Tam M'Tavish stepped back, his head perched on one side like an inquisitive hen, his hands thrust deeply into his breeches pocket.

"Oh aye," he said softly, "but you're not telling me, Mr. Merrick, that Mrs. Selby is the lady who is starving for the grand boulevards de Paris?"

"Yes, she is," said the other doggedly. "Now are you going to help?"

Tam looked at the floor for a long time. Then he walked slowly to the door and opened it.

"Ye'll be getting along now, Mr. Merrick," he said. "There'll be rain coming, or my corn is committing pairjury."

"All right," said the other, his face red with anger, "if you're going to play the sneak on an old comrade, Tam, of course I'm in your power."

"I would no outrage yar sense of decency by so low doón an action," said Tam with cold sarcasm. "There's na reason to sneak against ye, Mr. Merrick; ye're no married, and if ye were I shouldna want your wife, or the chaperone within yair gates, to go zooming off to Paris wi' me. Noo, will ye get oot?" His voice trembled with suppressed fury, and Mr. Merrick did not look back as he strode down the flagged path of the garden to his waiting car.

Tam went back to his room not a little perturbed. Such problems as these came very seldom into his experience, and when, as they did at times, he caught glimpses of an ugly side of life, more ugly than the battle-fields of France and Flanders had shown him, he was nauseated.

Before he had joined the Flying Corps he had been a mechanic in a Glasgow factory, and his life had been one of singular austerity. He had hated war: his chief offense against society had been his hatred of war, and his steadfast refusal to join the army until the sheer mechanics of flying had lured him into uniform. But there were things he hated worse than war.

He had heard, and perforce been a spectator, of uncleanly things, but to him they were part of the phenomena of the circumstances in which he found himself. He was a spectator without ever having the faintest idea that he could be a participator in irregularities which neither offended nor interested him.

He was not readily shocked, but now, as he sat down and thought out the situation which had been presented to him that afternoon, he was first bewildered, then horrified. Little Selby had been a favorite of his: Tam had liked him because of his sheer incompetence. He was the worst pilot in the flight, crashed more machines on landing than any other man in the squadron, and had escaped the consequence of his blundering so often that he had earned the nickname of "the immortal Selby." He was a straight little man, with a heart as big as his head, a man without fear or malice. He had eventually been transferred to the tactical bureau of the corps, where he had made a big name for himself. Tam went to his wedding, and had admired, in his critical way, his fluffy little bride. Tam was not a fair judge of women. Whatever might be their qualities, they were foredoomed to fall short of the standard represented by the girl who bore his name, and who, at that moment, with the chubby son of his house, was visiting her relations on the other side. It didn't seem possible that a girl like Mrs. Selby . . . and yet Tam knew in his heart of hearts that Merrick

had spoken the truth. To go to the injured husband was impossible. To warn the girl herself was beyond Tam's courage.

He went back to his little barn to find half his precious dope had boiled over on the floor, extinguishing the fire and adding to the general confusion of smells the additional pungency of escaping gas.

It was a week later before Tam found time to go to London. His experiment, and a hiring which took him into Cornwall, intervened.

Selby, he discovered, was employed by a firm of city architects, but he was not in his office. He had not been there for three days. Tam inquired for his private address, and took a bus to Hampstead to call at the house, without having any definite idea in his mind as to what he would say, or what excuse he would make for his visit when he got there.

He had, too, an uncomfortable feeling that Mrs. Selby knew of his refusal to aid Merrick, and the knowledge that he was privy to her secret could not fail to be embarrassing to both.

The house, a little villa, was locked up. No answer came to his knock; the blinds were drawn; and he inquired of a neighbor. The neighbor was so woodenly discreet that Tam felt his heart sink. Then by a piece of good luck he came upon a gossiping milkman who supplied disquieting information.

Mrs. Selby had gone away; whither, nobody knew. She had left a note, because the house-

maid had seen Selby read it on his return in the evening. The next morning he closed up the house, and himself disappeared.

The milkman was satisfied that the lady had run away, and that her husband had started off in pursuit of her, and that was the view that Tam took until he read the next week in the newspaper a paragraph saying that John Selby, an ex-officer of the Royal Air Force, had been charged with being drunk and disorderly in the west end of London, and had been discharged with a caution.

Tam came to London again and tried to find his old comrade. At the police court they furnished him with the address that the prisoner had given. This proved to be a furnished room in Bloomsbury, which Selby had quitted the day after his appearance at the police court.

Tam went back to his experiments with a sad heart.

It was four days before Christmas that he received a letter, and the handwriting on the envelope seemed familiar. He opened it. It was from Selby, and it was dated from Tunbridge Wells.

> "Dear Tam (it ran), I hear you have been making inquiries about me and I am sorry I missed you. At present I am in a nursing home, rather run down, but I hope you will come and call upon us when I get out, which will be some time in the new

year. My wife will be very glad to see you. She has been abroad for a little while, but she is now back in town."

Tam read the letter again. "She is now back in town." He frowned, and then a smile slowly dawned on his face, and he went back to the work of painting his machine, for he had discovered that non-inflammable dope for which inventors had sought, a dope that rendered even a soft wood fireproof, so that he could thrust a stick painted with the wonder into the heart of a coal fire and withdraw it hot but flameless. The sturdy little air-taxi grew green under his persevering brush, and his diminutive assistant and he worked while daylight lasted, covering fusilage and wings, rudder post, and elevators with the fire-resisting concoction.

On the Christmas Eve Tam had finished his work. It had been a raw, gray day, a south-westerly gale had blown itself out, and had been succeeded by a drizzling rain, and Tam, who, like most Scotsmen, had less of a sentimental interest in Christmas than in the New Year, retired to his snuggery to read.

Two long shelves carried his reading matter, and the literature was of a type which is very seldom found in the libraries of ordinary students. For they were those stories of daring and adventure which delight the heart of youth. Stories of superhuman cowboys, of unnaturally villainous desperadoes, and amazingly brilliant

detectives, who discovered on the last page the solution which the reader had found for himself on the second. Stories of heroic young sailors, who, although of a tender age, had ordered captains from the bridge in moments of peril, and had piloted gallant barques to safe harborage amidst the applause of beautiful passengers. They were all very precious to Tam, and more convincing, more human than the tales of Phryxus or Ulysses, or the Pythian Apollo.

He filled his pipe and settled back comfortably into his chair, and only the sound of rainwater dripping from the runnels and the occasional flap-flap where the wind caught a loose board of his hangar broke the stillness. Presently the sound of the tapping board got on Tam's nerves, and he rose, slipped on his boots, and went out into the night with a hammer and a nail. He nailed down the board, opened the door of the hangar and took a look at the machine. He touched the glittering paint with his finger, and wiped his finger on his overall before he withdrew, locking the door behind him. As he drew nearer the house he was conscious of a shrill sound. It was the telephone ringing, and he hurried indoors.

"Is that Mr. M'Tavish?" said a voice.

"That's me," said Tam.

"We've a job for you tonight."

"Who is it talking?" asked Tam.

The speaker gave the name of a firm that Tam did not remember having heard before.

"It's no' a night for flyin'," said Tam discouragingly, for the cheerful fire and the open book on the table had a powerful appeal. "There's no moon and——"

"The fee is a hundred guineas each way," was the reply. "The glass has gone up and the wind is veering to the west. It is a case of life or death, Mr. M'Tavish."

Tam scratched his chin.

"Will it no' do in the morning?" he asked.

"No," was the emphatic reply. "A gentleman has been bitten by a mad dog. He must get over to Paris tonight to the Pasteur institute for an injection. You can bring him back before the early morning."

"Is there no Pasteur institute in this country?" asked Tam in surprise.

"This is a special case," said the man impatiently. "Will you take it?"

"How long will he be?" asked Tam.

"He'll be with you in an hour," was the answer.

Tam looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock.

"All right," he said. "Does he know where I live? I'll be waiting in the field."

"Flash a lamp," said the speaker. "He will come over on his motor-bicycle."

"Where are you speaking from?" asked Tam.

"From London," and then they were cut off.

Tam hung up the telephone receiver, put a fire-guard before the fire, and then went up to change. A quarter of an hour later with some

difficulty he wheeled the aeroplane from its hangar and filled up his tanks. Then he dragged the machine to the end of the field he leased. A night ascent had no terrors for Tam, particularly now that the wind had fallen and the stars showed through the breaking clouds.

He had been waiting half an hour when he heard the "ticka-tick" of a motor-cycle coming along the road. Presently it stopped and he flashed his hand-lamp. A few minutes later a man came walking towards him out of the darkness. He saved Tam from committing the impertinence of flashing his lamp upon him by stopping to light a cigarette. Tam had a glimpse of a man with a close-cropped iron beard and heavy black eyebrows.

"You'll no' be able to smoke, sir," said Tam.

"Oh, shan't I?" said the other gruffly as he threw his cigarette away. "Are you ready?"

"Ah've just to swing the prop," said Tam, and was moving off.

"You'd better take this money," said the passenger, and thrust a roll of notes into Tam's hand.

"It would have done any time," said Tam politely. Nevertheless, he buttoned it away into his pocket. The stranger, he noticed, was dressed in a leather coat perfectly equipped for the journey.

"Where would you like to be landing?" said Tam. "There are two aerodromes."

"There's one to the east of the city—the old army aerodrome."

"It's no' used now," said Tam.

"It will do," said the man. "It is nearest to —to the institute."

Tam looked at him suspiciously. He was not the type of man who would be engaged in smuggling, beside which he carried no baggage whatever, and the things in which smugglers find profit have bulk. Tam knew that it was an irregularity to land passengers at any other than the official aerodromes, but he was not a stickler for the law. Tam, at heart, was a revolutionary. Regulations filled him with an insane sense of resentment, and his first temptation on being acquainted with a new rule was to break it.

"Will you be able to land here on the return journey?" asked the passenger.

"I'll land or fa'," said Tam laconically.

Ten minutes later the machine was racing through a mist of cloud, and they glimpsed the world below at intervals. Tiny spangles of light at wide intervals and parallelograms of lighted pin-points distinguished country from town.

Now they were over the sea, rolling and pitching in the uneven air which the storm had left in its trail.

Calais light stabbed up at them in vivid, narrow beams, and an air-way lighthouse sent a steady pillar of light to the sky to direct them. Soon Paris was ahead on the horizon, a blur of white and yellow lights, and Tam banked to the left and peered downward for the landing ground he had known so well during the war.

It lay in the center of a triangle, the base of which was the white arcs of a railway siding, the apex a blast furnace, the blue light of which was visible.

Tam had not landed here for eighteen months. It might have been built on for all he knew, or worse still, it might be littered with war stores, the fate of so many aerodromes.

He could see nothing in the black void to which the nose of his machine was pointing. Down, down he swept, and then peering through two eyes which were veritable slits he dropped the nose a fraction more, flattened out and landed without mishap.

"Here ye are, sir," he said. "What time will ye be thinking of returning?"

The man leapt lightly to the ground.

"If I'm not back by three o'clock I shall not be coming at all," he said, and added, "I shall have been detained in the institute for further treatment."

"Very good, sir," said Tam gravely. "The best way into the town is along by the railway. You strike the road about five hundred yards away."

The stranger did not trouble to reply. He disappeared into the darkness, and Tam remembered that he had not asked him his name. He lit his pipe and was walking round the machine when he felt something soft at his feet, and turned the flashlight on it. It was the stranger's leather coat, his gloves and the helmet he had

been wearing. Apparently he had carried some sort of cloth cap in his pocket. Tam looked at the coat and smiled ruefully, for it was daubed and streaked with the fire-resisting dope which was perfect in all respects save that it refused to dry.

It happened that that night Mr. Merrick entertained a party at the "Chien de Chine," which at the moment was the rendezvous of all that was smart and fashionable in Paris. At eleven o'clock in the evening his dinner-party might be said to have only just begun for most of the guests. For Mr. Merrick it had begun in the afternoon at the American bar at Pangianas, and eleven o'clock found him tearfully voluble on women and their fickleness. He had an interested audience. For Walter Merrick was an extraordinarily wealthy young man, and those kind of orators command a respectful hearing. "*Donna e mobile*" from the orchestra furnished at once the text and the excuse for the lecture, which began with a toast which he insisted upon all his guests drinking. The toast was "Absent fairies," and most of the company knew who his fairy was and the circumstances in which she had flown away.

". . . mind you, I admit I was disagreeable," said Mr. Merrick a little thickly. "But when a woman whines all the time about another fellow, what is a fellow to do? I sent her packing! She bored me, she wearied me, but, girls, I adore her!"

He blinked back two drunken tears.

"She's got 'n impossible husband, the awful fool——"

He went on to talk frankly and, to the ears of any decent man or woman, unpleasantly. They would have got up and left the gilded-mirrored room, and would have drunk in God's fresh air with gratitude and relief. But the acquaintances Walter Merrick had accumulated—and he had had the pick of every revue house in Paris—only imperfectly understood him when he spoke in English, and would not have been greatly offended if they had understood all.

"What I think about women . . ." resumed Merrick after a pause.

He got so far when the door opened slowly. A man with an iron-gray beard stood in the doorway. The bemused host did not see him for a moment, and when he did a frown gathered on his plump face.

"Hello, who the devil are you?" he asked.

The stranger did not reply. He raised an automatic which was in his hand and fired twice, and Walter Merrick fell across the table stone dead. Before the most excitable could scream, the door closed with a crash and a key was turned.

It was half-past one when Tam thought he heard somebody moving toward him, and pressed the key of his electric lamp.

"There you are!" said a voice. "Put out your lamp. Are you ready?"

"Aye," said Tam. "Did ye get what ye wanted?"

"Yes," said the man shortly.

They made a good get-away, but it was not till they were over Abbeville that Tam remembered that he had not mentioned the leather coat which he had stowed in the fusilage. He leant forward and tapped the man on the shoulder.

"Your coat's under your seat," he yelled, and saw the passenger nod, but he made no attempt to shelter himself from the keen south-westerly wind.

Tam reached Horsham, flying unerringly by certain land-lights which were familiar to him, and he made his landing in the dark without troubling to fire the magnesium flares under his wing tips. It was four o'clock when he said good-bye to the stranger, and heard the "tick-a-tick" of his cycle growing fainter and fainter in the direction of Horsham town. Then he turned to the task of housing his machine.

"A happy Christmas to ye, son," he said grimly as he stood surveying himself in the bedroom mirror. "Ye're a grand pilot but, man, ye're a puir, mean kind of inventor," and he spent another hour ridding himself of the dope that would not dry on anything except his clothing.

It was later in the morning over a frugal breakfast that he read of the murder of Walter Merrick. The reporters had given a very graphic description of the orgy which had preceded the murder, and one had secured an almost

vertabim report of Merrick's drunken homily. Tam read the account through several times. Then he folded the paper and went on eating his breakfast with great calmness. Now the story of May Selby's folly was revealed in all its ugliness, for although no names were given, Tam guessed who the woman was—the woman who had "bored" the exigent Mr. Merrick and whom he had sent "packing."

In the afternoon he got out his little two-seater and drove to Tunbridge Wells, a journey of twenty miles.

He had no difficulty in finding the nursing-home where Selby was confined, and almost immediately he was taken by the matron to the big room which the sick man occupied.

"No," said that lady in reply to his question. "Mr. Selby isn't very ill. He requires rest and quiet. He has been suffering a little from over-strain."

"Has he been here long?"

"For nearly a week," said the matron. "He has a room on the ground floor in one of the wings. He is such a light sleeper that the slightest noise awakens him. Mrs. Selby is with him now."

Tam stopped dead.

"Mrs. Selby?" he said in a panic, and then, drawing a long breath, "Verra good, ma'am if ye'll be kind enough to show me the way."

Selby was in bed, a fair-haired young man, his face was drawn and a little wasted by care, but he greeted Tam with a smile and a nod.

"I'm glad to see you, Tam," he said. "You got my letter."

"Aye, I got your letter. Good afternoon, Mistress Selby."

The girl who was sitting by the side of her husband's bed rose and held out her hand. Something had matured what had been mere prettiness into an almost ethereal beauty, thought Tam. There was no challenge in her eyes as he had expected. She met him with the assurance which wisdom gives to saint and sinner alike, and which comes from a knowledge of the worst. Her eyes were red, Tam noticed, and Selby with his quick intuition must have realized that Tam had noted this.

"My wife is rather upset by the death of an old friend of ours," he said. "You remember Merrick, Tam?"

The coolness of the question took Tam's breath away.

"Aye, I remember him," he said, after a pause.

"He was the man who was shot in Paris last night," said Selby gently, and Tam looked at him fascinated.

"You don't say," he said; then:

"Have you been to Paris lately?" asked Selby unexpectedly.

Tam was silent for a moment, then he shook his head.

"No, I've no' been to Paris for months," he replied, and his voice was as steady as Selby's.

Mrs. Selby went soon after, and Tam was left alone with the sick man.

"It's a grand room you've got, Mr. Selby, sir," he said. "A beautiful large window, and you could drop into the garden as easy as saying knife. And I don't doot that ye could keep a nice little motor-cycle in yon garage."

He nodded his head toward the open window.

"I dare say I could, Tam," said Selby quietly.

Tam rubbed his chin with an irritable gesture.

"Mr. Selby, sir," he said, "do ye remember the theatrical entertainments we used to have in France? They were fine and gay. And do ye remember how ye used to make up like an auld gentleman, so that you're best friends wouldn't know ye?"

Selby did not reply.

"I'll be awa' the noo," said Tam, and held out his hand.

The other hesitated, and then with a quick movement clasped the outstretched palm.

Tam held the hand for a moment, then turned its palm upwards. There was a faint green stain across the fingers.

"Ye'll find pumice-stone the only thing that'll take it off," said Tam, and walked slowly to the door.

With the edge of the door in his hand he turned.

"Did ye not know, Mr. Selby, sir," he said reproachfully, "that ye could no' smoke a cigarette in a bus? It was verra unprofessional, Mr. Selby, sir, verra unprofessional."

TheUndisclosed Client

A snowy night in early March; underfoot, the stone sidewalk smeared with a film of mud. Yet Mr. Lester Cheyne did not hurry: his walk, the slow pace of a man who was thoroughly enjoying a happy experience which he was loathe to bring to the end, which was marked by the cozy lobby of Northumberland Court and the luxury of a suite that lay beyond.

The snow fell in a picturesque and almost theatrical way, large distinct flakes that fell vertically and showed themselves to the best advantage in the light of the big arc lamps. Along the Embankment the bare arms of the plane trees were marked white; in the dark river that ran at the far side of the granite parapet, two tug-boats were passing, one up and one down river. They were tagged with green and red lights that splashed shivering and grotesque reflections on the water. A span of yellow lamps located a distant bridge . . .

Lester, his throat enveloped in the upturned lambskin of his coat collar, could admire and absorb and enjoy. He had a wonderful feeling of content, such as any healthy man might ex-

perience who had performed a difficult task to his entire self-satisfaction.

It was the rush hour: the offices were emptying and the sidewalk held a triple line of hurrying walkers. He edged near to the railings of the Temple, not desiring to hamper the toilers of the world in their homeward trek. He also was a toiler, but in another sphere. He liked to think of himself as a general who, in the silence of a room aloof from his fellows, planned subtle and successful movements against an enemy, overwhelmingly superior in point of numbers and backed by limitless resources.

He was a slim, good-looking man of thirty-five, who looked ten years younger. When he was revealed to strangers as a successful lawyer, they were politely incredulous; yet he was very successful, and his sleek limousine and the apartment with the waxed walls and the silken tapestries were there to proclaim his prosperity to the world.

It was not a novel experience to be jostled as he strolled: elbows had grazed him, shoulders had lurched against his. A grunted pardon politely waved, and they passed on into the obscurity of the night and the oblivion of their unimportance.

But the girl in the brown coat did more: touched him with her arm, slipped sideways, and was caught deftly by the smiling Lester, and remained everlastingly in his life as a memory never to be expunged.

She fell ungracefully, one foot sliding outward, one doubled beneath her, arms flung violently in an effort to balance.

He caught her as awkwardly under the arm, and she slid forward, so that she became a human wheelbarrow that he was unconsciously pushing.

"Sorry . . . awfully sorry!"

He must either allow her to sit down in the snow and mud, or she must get up of her own power, for his rubbers had caked up with half-frozen slush and his foothold was precarious.

She recovered herself with the commendable agility of youth.

Twenty . . . younger perhaps. Or older. He wasn't sure. The white light of the spluttering arc lamp was merciless enough to tell whatever unpleasant truth there was to be told. But the verity was very pleasant. Eyes any color, but big and with little droops at the corners that gave her a certain lure. Mouth very red. Complexion faultless so far as could be judged.

She came erect, gripping at his fur collar: it was not an unpleasing sensation.

"I'm dreadfully sorry—I slipped."

"I noticed that," he said, and laughed.

When she smiled she was rather beautiful. He had not seen any woman . . . girl, whatever she was . . . quite so beautiful. At least, not for a very long time. And because they met in the atmosphere and environment of adventure she was almost painfully interesting.

"I knew something was going to happen to me this night," she said in the friendly way of one who shared equal mastership of the situation, if mastership was called for. "I slipped up once this morning at home, and I slipped over a rug in the office; the third trip was sure to come."

She gave him the grim little smile that naturally accompanies a nod of farewell, and quickened her pace to leave him behind. Then her right arm shot out and caught hold of the railings. In a fraction of a second he overtook her.

"You'd better walk with me—I am wearing rubbers. Have you far to go?"

"Charing Cross tube," she said ruefully. "Thank you, I will: I seem rather short on suitable footwear."

She lived in a girls' club at Hampstead and worked in an office on King's Bench Walk. She had seen two of the plays he mentioned . . .

Shabby? Not exactly. Cheaply dressed described her better. He could price the coat—the bargain stores sold them in saxe, *tête de nègre,* tobacco, fawn, navy, and black, and the fur collar had been, in the lifetime of its original wearer, attached to a frisky white tail and a pair of lop ears.

Mr. Lester Cheyne had his private and personal record of past adventures, and these included at least one young lady who had pounded the keys of a typewriter by day, and had grown sentimental in his society after business hours.

But high or low, he could not parallel that face or overcome the irritating sense that he had once met . . . seen . . . heard her before. A face in a crowd perhaps, or he had caught a glimpse of her one sunny evening in summer. He often walked this beat before dinner. The river inspired him.

"Have you had dinner?" he asked.

"I? Lord, no! I take supper when I get home —when I'm hungry. I think I shall be hungry enough tonight!"

He seemed to be considering something; his head drooped forward.

"If I suggested that I should give you dinner, would you call the police?"

He had a mock solemn brand of banter that never offended even a chance acquaintance, and seldom failed to bring about whatever lay at the end of it.

"I don't think so. One can't walk between the Temple and Charing Cross six hundred times a year without gathering a few invitations to dinner," she smiled.

"And how many have you accepted?" he asked blandly.

She shook her head. He gathered that these extemporaneous hosts had drawn blank.

"I didn't think you would," he said, "and yet I am most respectably placed. I have a Member of Parliament as my neighbor on the left, and the Dean of Westchurch has the flat on my right——"

"Oh!—you meant at your house?" The slight-

est tinge of disappointment in her voice. "That would be impossible, wouldn't it—I mean . . ."

She did not say what she meant, but that hardly mattered. He was not amazed that she had even considered the dinner invitation, because women could not amaze him. He understood them too well. They were made of the very stuff of unexpectedness. But he was a very quick thinker: as a general he struck like lightning at the first weak spot exposed. This quality of his had been of enormous profit to him.

"I almost wish my dean was a bishop and the Member of Parliament a Cabinet Minister," he murmured regretfully, "and that I, instead of being the most humble of lawyers, were the Chief Justice on his bench!"

Here was the parting of her ways. She had either to talk of snow and tugs that went gleaming up and down Thames River, or else she must dovetail a comment to his last words.

"Are you a lawyer? Then I must know you. There isn't a barrister in the Inner Temple I haven't seen."

So he talked lawyers and his own insignificance until they began to slow their paces, the yellow glow of the Underground station being just ahead of them. Before the open booking-hall they lingered, yet nearer to the sidewalk's edge than to the station. She wore a sort of pinky-brown silk stocking, ludicrously inadequate in this weather. The neat ankles were mottled with mud.

"I would not dare ask you to dine and go to a show—you'd hate going as you are. But a grilled pheasant and a spineless sole and a plebeian rice pudding to follow——"

"Don't! You are making me feel like a shipwrecked sailor."

Still she hesitated and shook her head.

"It is awfully nice of you, and somehow I know that you are—right. But I couldn't possibly. Where do you live?"

He nodded towards the railway bridge. Beyond, you can just see the austere corner of Northumberland Court, all gray stone and sedate and statesmanlike windows.

"Where is that?"

"Northumberland Court—next to the National Liberal Club. Its austerity is depressing. My two maids are Churchwomen, and, fearing the worst, peek through keyholes to make sure they are not missing it. At least I suspect them. One goes to church on Sunday morning and one on Sunday night. They are very English and can reconcile their deep religious convictions with a moderate but regular consumption of Pale Ale!"

She was looking at him all the time he talked, a half smile on her face, a kind of reluctant amusement in her eyes. They were gray, turning blue on the slightest provocation.

"You talk like a novelist!" she said, and he was faintly annoyed. There was an inference of plagiarism. "There is no sense in half-ad-

ventures," she said. "Produce your roasted pheasants and your Church of England parlor-maid!"

She walked more quickly now; seemed to him a little breathless. He hoped that he was not mistaken in this. He thought he could define exactly her point of view. She was crossing a Rubicon—but a shallow Rubicon. One could wade back at the first hint of danger—could even stop in the middle and cogitate upon the wisdom of the passage. So many women had created in their minds this practicable stream, learning later in some pain of soul the unfathomable depth of it, the swirl and fury of its inexorable current.

His flat was on the ground floor. One frosty-faced virgin opened the door to him, and vanished rapidly into the dining-room to set another place. Her counterpart hovered at the door of the little drawing-room, ready to act as guide or vestiare, or to perform whatever service woman can render to woman.

"Put your coat and hat in my room," said Lester. "Mary will show you——"

"Gosh—look at me!"

The girl's eyes were wide opened — she pointed a white finger towards the photograph that leant limply against a vase on the mantelshelf.

His first emotion was of anger at his stupidity in leaving the photograph lying about. It came that morning; he thought he had locked it away

in the drawer. Possibly the dyspeptic Mary had propped it against the Chinese candlestick.

Followed a thrill of wonder. There certainly was a distinct likeness between Lady Alice Farranay and Miss Brown Coat. A likeness and yet not a likeness . . . that of course accounted for the strange sense he had had of meeting a familiar face. He explained the dissimilarity.

"Don't be silly!" She had the lofty contempt of an elder sister. "I'm shingled and she isn't—that's the only difference. I don't know"—she was suddenly dubious—"the nose . . .? These studio photographers retouch so . . . but I *am* like her."

She had pulled off her hat with a shake of her head, and now the likeness was not so apparent.

"She has a fringe . . . I haven't. If I grew a fringe and allowed my hair to grow, and dressed it in that blobby way over the ears . . ."

Mary at the door was stepping from foot to foot impatiently—the girl became aware of her ingratiating smirk—a painful grimace which at once beckoned and inquired and went out.

Lester took up the photograph, examined it coldly, and laid it away in a drawer. After dinner it must go into the safe, with the photograph of Lady Alice that the butler took the day Johnny Basterby went to India, and the letters he wrote to her, vulgarizing in the crudity of words a something which had brought Alice Farranay into the splendid haze which is God.

A difficult proposition.

That is why Lester looked so coldly on the picture. The stuff of unexpectedness was here. A fighter, and yet she did not have the appearance of a fighter. Would she go down battling? —that was a question which very nearly concerned Lester Cheyne. Never before had he felt a qualm of misgiving or had the shade of a desire to back out, or recognized the depth and strength of his own private Rubicon. The letters? Could they be interpreted in any other than the obvious way? The butler's photograph . . . a back view, though unmistakably her ladyship. But might not a second cousin be permitted the liberty of an encircling arm as they paced towards Gollards Covert? He was leaving for India the next day, remember. These problems Mr. Cheyne had taken to the Thames Embankment and had settled to his complete satisfaction, when the brown-coated girl had executed pirouettes in the snow.

She would not fight. That kind of woman never fought, especially when they had money to burn. Not intelligent women. Alice could draw a check for twenty-five thousand pounds as easily as for ten. And the Undisclosed Client would benefit as usual.

Lord John Farranay was immensely rich. If he lived to inherit his father's dukedom he would be even richer. There was some doubt as to whether he would live. His father was ninety, Lord John a little over fifty, nearly thirty years his wife's senior. But John Far-

ranay had lived—not nicely, it is true, and he was an older man than his father, who had sown his wild oats in the hunting-field.

A tap at the door.

"Oh, there you are!"

He was relieved to see her. That word was revelation. Relieved. Never before in all his life had he welcomed diversion from the business at hand.

"You look awfully nice. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing. I tried to work down a fringe. What have you done with the picture? What a shame! You have put it away!"

"Pheasant!" he smiled. "*And* rice pudding!"

She admired the furnishing, the taste, the quiet luxury of everything. In the hall she stopped to look at the etchings, and before she sat down at the polished table must inspect the Corot over the sideboard.

"Soft . . . and air and breeze in it, isn't there?"

The lace mats on the table were rather fascinating. She fingered their texture with a sure, understanding touch.

"I suppose you are married? There's a sort of woman atmosphere which can't be your Pale Ale——"

Entered Mary with plates and dishes on a dumb waiter, and comment continued along these lines would have been embarrassing.

She was immensely pretty; not skinny either,

as so many of these poor-eating typists are. And rather beautiful hands. Her throat too—he was a connoisseur in the matter of throats. The line of them should incline a little forward and have as their capitol a peculiarly rounded chin.

"Wine you won't have, of course. Water is good for the young. I think I will take water too, Mary."

When the white-aproned servitor woman had gone:

"Do you know, this is very unreal? It is rather like one of those day-dreams that wanders on under its own power and brings you into such strange places. My name is Lois Martin. I suppose you are entitled to know that."

"Mine is Lester Cheyne . . . I'm sorry, I should have told you that before."

She took up the glass of water and drank slowly; put it down, patted her lips with the serviette.

"Who is she?—is that a very impertinent question?"

"Who? You mean the photograph? She's—er—just an acquaintance . . . a friend of a friend. I don't know much about her except that she is married to a very rich man who is rather jealous, rather mean, and desperately unwholesome. He is thirty years older than she."

"Why did she marry him?"

"He is very rich."

Lois Martin sighed.

"I suppose one ought to have a contempt for

women who marry rich men. But money means an awful lot: it comes into everything. It keeps you out of crowds, and you can't get into crowds without having something rubbed off—polish or bloom. And it keeps other people—people you love—out of crowds and queues. The divine thing that money buys is—isolation."

Curiously he looked at her. She spoke with a strange earnestness.

"And whom do you love?" he asked.

She was thinking of something, for she started at the sound of his voice.

"Nobody—yet. I love dreams and the beautiful things that come in dreams."

Her left hand rested on the table. Sure of her agreement, he reached out and covered it with his, and she did not draw her hand away. So far and no farther he went. This almost resemblance to Lady Alice was rather amusing—added a piquancy to the situation. To make love to one woman and to blackmail her twin . . . it was amusing.

"I rather like you," he said. "Do people worry you who have immediate likings and dislikings?"

"No. An interest which has to be flogged or coaxed is a pale substitute for the real thing. People either magnetize you and you jump an awful long way towards them, or else they belong to the crowd."

He was encouraged.

"My view entirely. I like to jump right into

the grand salon of friendships—I loathe giving my name at the door and being handed on through the antechambers, my virtue explained at every stage. By the time you've got to the middle of things there is nothing to be learnt about you and you're a bore exposed!"

When she said, as she did at eight o'clock, that she must go, he offered no objection.

"But I do hope that you will come to dinner one night—soon. I have an idea at the back of my head that we may be awfully useful to one another—I am shamelessly utilitarian, aren't I? But I feel that way towards girls—especially girls who are working for their living, and who aren't just looking for a good time and hang the consequence."

The paternal note seldom failed him, but for once there was a serious purpose behind his little speech. But how she might be employed, or whether he could employ her at all, were questions that tomorrow must answer.

She was hesitant again.

"I don't know . . . I should like to come, awfully."

Her scrutiny of his face was searching: she seemed baffled at the end of it. Not that his face was inscrutable to the student of physiognomy. Superficially he was handsome in a dark, pinched way. There were pictures of notable Florentines in the National Gallery that were of his type without his glossy little moustache. He was thin-lipped, blue-chinned, deep-

eyed. Giovanni Bellini painted a Doge of Venice who was not unlike Lester Cheyne, though he was darker than Loredano.

"I don't know—would you like me to come, really?"

Here was the conventional surrender.

He drove her home to Hampstead in a taxi and they held hands lightly most of the way.

She was quite different in most respects from the average pick-up, ladylike if not a lady. Though this quality was not essential, he had found. One pair of red, warm lips differed only from another in respect to the soul and the imagination back of the caress they offered.

Therefore he had every reason to be pleased with himself when he returned to Northumberland Court to the contemplation of Lady Alice Farranay, that beautiful but stiff-necked lady who might go down fighting but probably would not.

Mr. Cheyne's office was in the city of London, near Aldermanbury. It was like and yet unlike a lawyer's office. The appointments and furnishings reflected his own luxurious tastes. His staff was restricted to a girl who typed with two fingers and got through life with half a brain. She came in to him when he rang his bell, a dumpy young lady in an artificial silk jumper and a string of imitation amber beads.

"Mr. Mortlake has been waiting half an hour," she said in a hushed voice.

In two years of service she had learnt only this: she must not shout.

"Show him in, Clarissa."

His mood was gay and friendly. Her homely face was distorted in a smile of respectful reproof, for her name was Annie, but she was usually called Miss Synes.

A dapperish man, with a head too big for his thin body and an unhealthy white face, tiptoed into the room, holding a derby hat in his hand. He sat down in the chair which the girl had placed, and laid his hat on the floor.

"Anything——?" He drooped his head on one side—a gesture of interrogation.

"Nothing, Mortlake."

Mr. Cheyne had already run through the letters: there was none bearing the Melton Mowbray postmark.

"Ah—she'll write. Her ladyship is very obstinate, but she won't . . . you don't think she will?"

Mr. Cheyne shrugged his shoulders.

"You know her ladyship best," he said. "I am rather worried about the business—in fact, I am almost sorry that I agreed to act for you. The case is so very peculiar; in fact, it has almost the appearance of blackmail."

The peculiarity of Mr. Cheyne's operations was that there always came a moment in his relationship with his Undisclosed Clients when he expressed the wish that he was not acting for them and when their "cases" bore some verisimilitude to the crime of extorting money by threats. And yet invariably he went on to the bitter end, until, in fact, a check or a sealed

packet of banknotes enabled him to write "finis" to the episode.

There was sometimes an unpleasant aftermath. His clients had been known to complain in bitterness of the inadequacy of their reward.

There was the valet of the Honorable Arthur Keverling, who found a bundle of letters from the young wife of the Minister of Justice; and Millie Winston, the lady's maid, who brought to Aldermanbury the stupidly indiscreet diary of her mistress; and that wretched wastrel, the brother of Fay Lanseer, who thought that five thousand was a mighty poor share of the seventy thousand pounds which Lord Charholm had paid rather than hear his letters read in open court—Fay being his wife's best friend. But in the end they had been glad enough to avoid the alternative which Mr. Cheyne had offered—the return of money and documents under cover of a letter in which Mr. Cheyne would express his pain and indignation that he had been unwillingly and innocently the agent of blackmailers.

Mortlake was visibly alarmed.

"I don't see how you can say that, Mr. Cheyne. When I came to you first, you told me that I was to sue her for money lent and for damages . . . my being kicked out at a minute's notice and all that."

Which was true.

Mr. Cheyne was a blackmailer, but no vulgar blackmailer. He might very properly threaten to sue for the return of mythical loans; that

is part of a lawyer's business. He might take into his possession documents of a most compromising character, letters such as men and women have written to one another since the art of writing was invented, but he only did this to prove that the mere possession of such letters by his client was proof of his trustworthiness. For who would give letters of this kind to a servant for safe custody unless he or she was on such terms of friendship with the hireling that the loan, for the recovery of which action was taken, might very well have been solicited and granted? And if the victims of the Undisclosed Client retorted that the letters had been stolen, that was a very serious charge indeed, and Mr. Cheyne over his own signature suggested, nay demanded, that the pilfering servant should be prosecuted.

"You left Lady Alice's employment six weeks ago—were you with her long?"

"Eighteen months," said Mr. Mortlake. "His lordship engaged me soon after the marriage. I must say she's the best of the pair. His lordship is a swine in every way."

"Jealous?"

Mr. Mortlake smiled.

"Of his own shadow! He used to be, anyway, till he took up with Miss Wenbury. He'd give his head for a divorce and her ladyship knows it. He's poisonous. . . ."

He explained just why Lord John Farranay was poisonous, and Mr. Cheyne listened. He was not at all squeamish.

"The letters might get him the divorce—the photograph is worthless. We want something more. I wonder . . ."

His brows met in a disfiguring frown.

The girl in the Brown Coat beautifully arrayed and with that fringe manipulated, might very well be Lady Alice—— But exactly how he might use this resemblance was not clear.

"All right—don't come tomorrow. Say Friday, or, better still, next Monday."

Miss Synes answered the bell and stood imploringly at the open door until the visitor passed her.

Another letter, thought Mr. Cheyne. He dipped his pen in ink.

"Dear Madam,

"*Yourself and an Undisclosed Client*

"We are surprised that we have not had a reply to our letter of the 13th inst. You will, we feel sure, appreciate our desire to spare you unnecessary trouble and expense, nor is it our wish to place on record the name of our client, since we feel sure that it would be painful to you to have thus emphasized a financial transaction which might not be regarded as consonant with your dignity.

"Briefly we restate our claim: in October last you borrowed from our client the sum of fifty thousand pounds, giving him as

security certain letters which passed between yourself and Captain John Basterby, now on the staff of H. E. the Viceroy of India. The statement in your brief note of the 3rd to the effect that the letters were stolen by our client, who had never possessed so large a sum as fifty thousand pounds, constitutes a very serious charge. We feel in the circumstances that we must challenge you to prosecute our client for his alleged theft. In so far as concerns his ability to command so large a sum, we have our client's assurance that he inherited a considerable fortune from an uncle in America. We have again to request the name of your lawyer, who will accept service on behalf of our client."

Very correct; very proper. He blotted the draft and summoned his typist to make a fair copy.

Two nights later came the girl in the Brown Coat—punctually. Mr. Cheyne let her in.

"Do you mind a cold dinner? My maids have developed symptoms of influenza. Don't be alarmed!"

She smiled.

"I'm not a bit alarmed," she said.

He was afraid she would come in evening dress: bargain-basement evening dress might spoil her. Except that she wore a lighter frock and had a pair of new shoes obviously pur-

chased for the occasion, she was the same exquisite lady of his recollection.

"I have been thinking a lot about you," he said.

"Like——?"

"Well—these beastly mornings and nights, and the thought of you tramping through the slush with a herd of dirty people—and packed in stuffy cars. You don't belong to crowds. I've thought of what you said about crowds. How much do you earn a week?"

She named a sum as he relieved her of her coat. A ridiculously small sum it was.

"Absurd!"

He chucked the coat on the settee and led her to the fire, and when his arm went round her she did not so much as shiver. She even smiled up into his face.

"We are getting along," she said.

"Do you mind?"

She shook her head.

"No. I suppose I should if I were properly constituted. But it is rather easy to be made a fuss of, and one doesn't carry around the Girl Guides' Code of Conduct."

Stooping, he touched her lips with his, and then she pushed him gently away from her.

"Tell me something. Are you in the Temple?"

"No—City. I'm commercial. I've a bleak little office off Queen Victoria Street."

She made a little face.

"How uninteresting! I hoped at least you

were a police lawyer. Crime is so awfully fascinating. We are Chancery lawyers; dull! I could scream sometimes. You do a lot of work here, don't you?"

She pulled at the handle of the green wall-safe.

"How funny! That doesn't seem to go with the furniture, and you have wonderful taste."

"Come and eat," he replied, purring. He loved appreciation of his finer side.

There was wine on the table, but he offered her none until she pushed forward her glass.

"Bless your bright eyes!" He toasted her, and immediately afterwards: "I am going to make you rich," he said, and she laughed.

"That sounds like temptation," she said, and he admitted that it was. Women love directness. He knew all about women. Too great a subtlety silts up progress. Yet he was a delicate speaker and she listened without protest.

"I couldn't . . . I don't think I could. There would be awful trouble at the club. One is supposed to be in by twelve. And . . . no!

And yet it was an easy matter to send somebody for her belongings next day. She had a friend there who would pack them.

"Talk about something else. Where is the picture of the beautiful lady like me? Who is she—really?"

He poured her another glass of wine and then filled his own.

"She is the defendant in a case I am bringing on behalf of—an Undisclosed Client."

She wanted him to explain further, pleaded with him to bring the picture.

"A little alteration and you would be her double," he said, when he brought it back and laid it on the table before her.

She stared down at the photograph.

"Who was she?"

"She was the daughter of a disagreeable old soldier," he said carelessly. "But to the devil with her! Let us speak of really important things."

He was behind her as he spoke; both his arms went round her, meeting at the waist; the shingled head was against his cheek, the fragrance of hair and skin was a little heady, and he had his first heart-thump.

"Perhaps she has an Undisclosed Client too," she suggested, and he laughed softly.

"Even now you don't understand—and after all the trouble I took to explain! Only lawyers have clients——"

Her head turned—his lips sought hers.

"No . . . I couldn't. I was stupid to come here. Drink your wine."

She struggled out of his grasp, but not frantically. Surrender was in every gentle movement of her.

He lifted the glass.

"Here's to us!" he said.

"To the Undisclosed Client!" she mocked, and they drank together.

"Queer how you and I met," he said, and dabbed his lips with a silk handkerchief. "Out of all the millions that walk these greasy streets —you are terribly like her."

"Like——?"

"Lady Alice—except for the way you dress your hair, you might be her double."

The girl had been looking down at the tablecloth, fiddling with the stem of her wine-glass. Now she raised her eyes and there was a queer smile in them.

"I suppose I am—I should be, you know. I *am* Lady Alice Farranay!"

His mouth opened in surprise and then he laughed.

"You took my breath away: your little joke, eh!"

She shook her head.

"I am Lady Alice. You see, you are a difficult man to fight. I had heard about you—Fay Keverling told me. Of course you had the letters and things from Mortlake—my butler? I see I am right."

"You're—Lady—Alice?"

He was numb with amazement—he had never felt quite as he felt now, so dazed, so peculiarly stupefied.

"I thought it would be easy—but not so easy as it was. And when you asked me here to a

little dinner, I knew that you would be alone. I had to do it. I have an Undisclosed Client too —one worth fighting for," she said, and he smiled crookedly.

"By gad—you've a nerve . . . now suppose you go, Lady . . . Lady Alice . . ."

His forehead was wet, he was surprised to find when he put up his hand to it.

"What d'you expec' to get . . . coming here?"

Why was his speech so thick, and his heart bumping so?

"The letters . . . they are in your safe. I had to guess that. And the key is on the chain in your pocket. I put some stuff in your wine when you were out of the room. Morphia and something else—there is a dear old doctor who would have given me poison if I had wanted it. . . . Of course I knew you would be alone . . ."

He did not hear the rest very distinctly. Clutching the edge of the table and bringing all his will power to bear, he attempted to walk to the door. And then his knees doubled under him and he found the floor very peasant to lie upon and dream upon . . .

The girl watched him till he lay still, and then, leaning over him, she unfastened the golden key-chain he carried, examined the ring, and, choosing a key, walked to the safe. This she unlocked with a hand that did not tremble.

She took out the letters and read their beginnings . . . near the end of one a sentence arrested her eye.

"... I have a feeing something happened. You will tell me, beloved, won't you? And I'll stand by you ..."

Lady Alice Farranay smiled faintly and dropped letters and photograph into the fire and watched them consumed to ashes. On the table was her photograph. It had been a shock to find herself confronted with that when she first entered the flat. But by drawing his attention to the resemblance she had stifled surprise before it had formed. This photograph went the way of its fellow; curled blackly in the flames, and was poked to fragments.

Relocking the safe, she fastened the keychain to the pocket of the unconscious man, picked up her overcoat, then she walked out into Northumberland Avenue and hailed a taxi.

. . . . . .

Mr. Cheyne was in retirement at a little Italian town when he read the announcement in the Paris edition of an English paper. He knew, of course, that the old Duke and his impossible son had died in the same week, but this intelligence was both new and startling:

"Lady Alice Farranay gave birth yesterday to a son, and Billshire is rejoicing that the Dukedom is not, as was feared, extinct. Lady Alice is the daughter of the late General Sir Gregory Stannart, and comes of a famous fighting family."

"Humph!" said Mr. Cheyne—for very good reasons he called himself "Mr. Burton Smith," and he had shaved off his moustache. "Humph! Baby! . . . Undisclosed Client! I never thought of that!"

Red Beard

One of his most jealously guarded secrets should have perished when the safety-catch of John Mildred's Browning pistol caught in a loose strand of thread as he was pulling his gun. How that thread came to be there may be explained in technical language by Mildred's housekeeper, who kept his clothes in repair.

The thread was stout, but broke at the second jerk, and the mischief was done. At the first tug a loop had formed about the catch and had pulled it to safety, and when John threw his gun at Red Beard nothing happened. He saw the mischief and thumbed down the catch, but by this time the visitor had fired three times, shattering the aorta arch and the pulmonary artery.

John, his hands widespread on the table, stared at his murderer, and in his last moment of life God gave him vision.

"I'm glad . . . didn't shoot," coughed John Mildred thickly, and smiled.

Then he sat down carefully in his writing-chair and as carefully died. I found him reclining over the table, his head on his arms, and 'phoned Central Office.

Evidence produced: One Browning pistol un-

fired, with loop of thread jammed between safety-catch and chamber; one broken thread in hip pocket; one weeping, hysterical housekeeper who admitted Red Beard at 10:15 p. m., and had heard the shots and "Mr. Mildred's last words, poor gentleman," and had subsequently been pushed aside by Red Beard. Evidence of unexploded cartridges in Mildred's faithless pistol, and three shells from the murderer's gun—and Mildred. He was killed by three shots from a Holt automatic 45 calibre.

Brinkhorn, Deputy Chief of the Department, came along with me to conduct the examination, and he kept the real police at bay in the hall below until we had finished; this by virtue of our special warrants and the fact that Brinkhorn is all sorts of a great white chief, a deputy sheriff, a puller of strings, and what not.

"Rum how old Mildred hated people with whiskers," I said, remembering John's eccentricity. "I'll bet it was the humiliation of being shot out by Red Beard that hurt him most."

"You can't choose your murderer in these times," said Brinkhorn, always the philosopher; "help me lay him on the sofa, I want to search his pockets."

But I suggested leaving him until the real police came—they are frantically jealous folk, and Brinkhorn agreed.

John had a little smile on his white face when we, having admitted the impatient coppers, put him down. It was as though he had lived long

enough to see a capital joke in circumstances which arranged his dissolution.

The police made notes and would have collected his papers and probably would have sealed up the room also, but Brinkhorn stopped them, 'phoned the Chief Commissioner, and secured endorsement of the divine right of Military Intelligence 93 to interfere. Then we bundled the cops out of the room, lit our pipes, took off our coats, and got busy. It was a warm room, being centrally heated. We opened the drawers systematically, taking the locked drawers first.

John was one of those card-index maniacs, who flourish even in departments like ours. If you wanted to discover his trouble you turned up "T" so to speak. As a matter of fact, we knew most of his secrets, but not the cause of his feud with the red-bearded man. We hoped to find it here. He had told us, of course, little bits about Red Whiskers, but had so punctuated his recital with those deep, choking chuckles of his, that we never really knew how much there was in it.

"The point is," said Brinkhorn, sitting down suddenly in the chair from which we had just removed the dead man (you cease to be sentimental after your tenth violent death), "the point is, was old man Mildred pulling our legs when he told us that he was being threatened?"

I shook my head.

"I have seen the letters," said I; "they followed him about all over the shop. They used

to be waiting for him at the club. Even when he went on secret missions, which nobody but you and I knew about, he would find them waiting for him at his hotel, addressed to him in his assumed name. They were always signed 'Red Beard,' and always telling him that his time was near at hand."

I shall always remember Brinkhorn as he sat, his chin resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, his eager, handsome face momentarily clouded.

"He never showed them to me," he said, half to himself; "that is curious, because I was one of his best pals. I am not saying," he said, hastily apologetic, "that you didn't know him better in many ways than I, and it is only natural that you should, because you were working together, and most of the coups he pulled off during the war were as much to your credit as to his."

"In some cases more to his than mine, in some cases more to mine than his," said I. "He deserves the whole credit for catching von Klotz, the woman, Minnie Lauer, and the Pfeifer gang, whilst I think that pretty well all the credit for catching Schmidt, da Silver, and Martinique go to me."

That may sound immodest, but four years of strain and danger and sleepless anxiety have destroyed most of my affectations, even the pose of modesty.

Brinkhorn nodded.

"I think we had better go through the record

of the men he pinched," he said; "this is obviously a vendetta, and one of the relatives of the gentleman who 'marched with a firm step to the gallows' as the newspapers say, is behind this affair. Afterwards we will talk to the housekeeper lady if she has quite recovered. By the way," he said suddenly, "what happened to that card that was on the floor when we came in?"

There certainly had been a card, one of those large index cards on which Mildred was wont to enter data, and it had assuredly been lying midway between the door and the desk when we came into the room. It was not there now.

"I picked it up," I said, "and put it on the desk."

Brinkhorn turned over the papers, but there was no card. Whereupon he cursed all interfering policemen, and 'phoned the nearest station, but without success. The two active and intelligent officers of the law who had made a superficial search of the desk, had taken nothing away with them. I looked at Brinkhorn and Brinkhorn looked at me.

"It is strange," he said, and we dropped the subject temporarily.

There was no difficulty at all in unearthing the record of the men whom Mildred had hunted to death. We found the index number under "E"—"Espionage, convictions for," and we took their dossiers out of the deep twin cabinet beneath the bookcase. There they were, the whole crowd of them, and it pleased me to see

how he had marked my cases, or rather those in which I played a more prominent part than he, with a big "T" for Templey, which is my name.

We carried them to the desk under the light, and went through them carefully. Willie von Klotz, Hans and Johanna Pfeifer, the van Lauer woman, Bissing, Prensa, Schumacher — they were all there.

"Who was Goertz?" asked Brinkhorn suddenly. "I don't seem to remember that case."

"You were in France at the time," I said, "but it was an ordinary typical case of espionage. Mildred shadowed him for a week before he arrested him at Plymouth. He was shot in the Tower."

Brinkhorn read through the closely written précis in silence, his head in his hands.

"Listen to this," he said.

> " 'Von Goertz is an officer of the Prussian Hussars. He speaks English and French fluently. In appearance he is a fine-looking fellow, tall and well made. He has a good forehead, blue eyes, and——' "

Brinkhorn paused and looked up.

> " 'A striking red beard!' "

"H'm," said I, "this is not our Red Beard at any rate, for Goertz was shot and Mildred saw the execution."

"You are sure of this?"

"Absolutely," said I. "I can give you the name of the Provost Marshal who superintended the business."

"There is no chance of course, of his having got away or having escaped death?" mused Brinkhorn.

I smiled.

"Men who are shot at twelve paces with soft-nosed bullets do not, as a rule, escape death," said I dryly.

Brinkhorn looked across to the sofa where Mildred lay.

"Then it wasn't Goertz," he said; "let us have the lady up."

Mrs. Cummins, the housekeeper, had reached the feeble and helpless condition of hysteria, when even the sight of Mildred's body would not unduly distress her, but to make absolutely sure, Brinkhorn and I pushed the sofa into the dressing-room and shut the door.

We got her seated, and I put her through a mild cross-examination.

At 9:30, Mr. Mildred being out (so her story went), there came a ring at the front door, and, thinking it was her employer, she opened it to discover a man on the doorstep. It was snowing heavily, a particularly wild night, and there was only a dim electric light in the doorway and that covered by an art-shade, so that she had the vaguest impression as to the visitor's appearance.

"Was he tall?" I asked.

"Middle size, if anything. He wore a long

fur-lined overcoat and a soft hat, and he had gloves—big furry gloves on his hands."

She was emphatic as to the red beard which flowed over the front of his coat and glistened with melting snow. Equally sure she was that that part of his face as was visible was "as white as death."

He asked if Mr. Mildred was in, and when she said No, he said he would wait. She hesitated, but he was urgent, speaking in a gruff voice which somehow did not seem to her to be natural.

Mr. Mildred had so many strange visitors, she said in extenuation (and this we understood perfectly well), that she did not like to deny him, and led the way up to Mildred's room, switching on the table-lamp and bringing forward an arm-chair where he might sit. Happily her perturbation of mind was set at rest a few moments later, when she heard Mildred's key in the lock of the front door, and went to meet him with the information that a gentleman had called.

"And he expected him, sir," said the trembling housekeeper. "When I told him a gentleman was waiting, he said, smiling quite pleasant, 'Has he got a red beard?' "

"And you said 'Yes,' " said Brinkhorn, nodding. "Did he say anything more to you?"

"Nothing more, sir. I heard him go into his room, and then I thought I would go upstairs to find if he wanted anything—he usually had

a cup of tea. I was outside the door when I heard voices, then three shots''—her lips trembled. ''I heard Mr. Mildred say, 'I am glad I didn't shoot you,' and for a bit I thought it was all right. I was very frightened, sir. I was going downstairs when the door was flung open and the red-bearded gentleman dashed down past me. Then I telephoned to Mr. Templey at his club—Mr. Mildred told me I was always to telephone to Mr. Templey in case of emergency, and that is all I know, sir.''

''You heard nothing beside the shots and Mr. Mildred saying, 'I am glad I didn't shoot you'?''

''Nothing, sir.''

''Has the red-bearded gentleman been here before?''

''No, sir.''

''Have you ever been warned not to admit the red-bearded man?''

''No, sir.''

Again she was hesitant.

''Mr. Mildred did say,'' she said, ''that he was expecting a funny visitor one of these days, and he asked me how tall I was.''

''That's a rum question to ask you,'' smiled Brinkhorn.

''I thought it was, sir, but you know Mr. Mildred would have his little joke.''

Brinkhorn lifted his head.

''There's the bell, Mrs. Cummins. I think you will find it is the police ambulance. I shall leave one of my men here tonight. Nothing must be

dusted or tidied or in any way touched in this room until I give you permission."

We accompanied Mildred's body and saw him put away in the hospital mortuary, then I accepted Brinkhorn's invitation to go home with him to supper.

"If your wife doesn't object to a visit at this hour," I said.

"I have just telephoned to her," said Brinkhorn, "and she will be glad to see you."

(One of the advantages of marrying a widow, thought I, as the taxi drove slowly across Westminster Bridge in a perfect blizzard, is that she is accustomed to the eccentricities of mankind and nothing surprises her, even the apparition of her husband arrving home with a guest at midnight.) Great minds think alike, and Brinkhorn must have had a telepathic wave.

"God has given me a very intelligent wife," he said, with a happy little laugh. "I would like to bet if we gave her all the facts of the case she would find a solution to the mystery of Red Beard. How she hates the Huns, poor girl!"

The story of Mrs. Brinkhorn was known to me. She had been the wife of a Canadian officer, and was on her way to England, accompanied by her baby boy, to join her husband. Her voyage coincided with the big gas attack in the Ypres salient, and her husband was killed on the very day that U.97 had torpedoed a liner in which she was traveling. She and a few passengers who were landed on the Irish coast were

the only survivors. Undoubtedly she hated the Hun.

"The case is a pretty simple one," Brinkhorn went back to our dead friend. "Mildred is, or was, a clever servant of the Department of Justice, lent by Washington to our Counter-Espionage Bureau. In the course of the four years he brings to justice a large number of German agents, amongst them von Goertz, whose brother determines to be revenged upon the slayer of his relative. Being a Hun, and totally ignorant of the Anglo-Saxon temperament, he thinks he will terrorize Mildred by writing threatening letters, the terrorization consisting not so much in the letters and their contents, but lying in the fact that this unknown avenger is able to demonstrate his knowledge of Mildred's movements.

"He awaits a favorable opportunity, gains admission to Mildred's room, probably ransacks his bureau—by the way we must find out what happened to that card—and shoots our pal."

"How do you account for Mildred's curious speech?" I asked.

"About being glad he didn't shoot him? Yes, that's rather quaint! Have you any theory?"

I made no reply.

"Of course it may be this," Brinkhorn went on, "that Mildred preferred that his murderer should endure the suspense of a trial."

"That wasn't Mildred's way," said I. "There wasn't a kinder-hearted man in the world than John."

"Then what do you think?"

"I'll tell you one of these days," said I, as the cab drew up before the house in Bryanston Square where Brinkhorn lived.

Mrs. Brinkhorn was a truly remarkable woman. She showed neither annoyance nor impatience with her husband for bringing a guest to the house at that hour, and had a nice little supper waiting for us. I had met her once before, but had never been so struck by her ethereal beauty. She wore a negligée costume of deep blue chiffon velvet. It was a sort of costume which to my ignorant eyes might have either been a dressing-gown or a dress, but I can only recall an impression of stateliness which was particularly pleasing.

"The telephone awoke Frank," she said with a smile; "he wants to come down to say good-night."

"Have him down," smiled Brinkhorn.

When the sleepy little fellow came toddling into the room, it was clear to me that Brinkhorn loved the child as much as if it was his own. He pushed him toward me for my admiration. He was a plump, sturdy little chap, and Brinkhorn laughed as I pulled up the leg of his pyjama.

"A sturdy boy," said I, patting his calves.

Mrs. Brinkhorn smiled faintly and put out her hand to the boy.

"Come along, Frank dear; you must go back to bed," she said.

She rejoined us a few minutes later, and by this time we were deep in the discussion of Mildred's end.

She listened without interruption until Brinkhorn turned to her.

"I was saying, my dear," said he, "that if we could leave this case in your hands, we would be pretty certain to find Mildred's murderer."

"You have a very great opinion of my genius," she said.

"And very rightly," said Brinkhorn warmly. "Now I am going to tell you, Templey, what I have never told anyone else. I have had a great deal of success in this war, and half of it is due to my wife. She has been my ghost and has done a lot of the work I have got credit for. Yes, you have, dear," he said, when she laughingly protested; "I rely upon your judgment absolutely."

"Mr. Templey is shocked," she smiled; "he thinks you have been betraying terrible Government secrets to me."

"It takes a great deal to shock me, Mrs. Brinkhorn," said I, "and I must confess that I am tremendously interested in what your husband says. Although he is not aware of the fact, I have taken up Mildred's murder, and intend applying myself single-handed to tracking down Mr. Red Beard, and I believe you can be of the greatest assistance to me."

They both stared at me.

"You think I am impertinent," said I, "and

it certainly does sound as though I was taking advantage of your confidence and hospitality, but there are points in this case which your husband has overlooked, and which I feel sure I could, with your assistance, elucidate. Mysteries which could be cleared up——''

''Including the mystery of the disappearing index card?'' interrupted Brinkhorn.

''Even that,'' said I.

''I should be glad to help you, said the girl—I judged her to be about twenty-seven. ''When would you like to call me into consultation?'' she asked, with quiet laughter in her eyes.

''There's a challenge for you,'' mocked Brinkhorn.

''If it were not so late, I should say—now!'' said I.

Brinkhorn roared with laughter.

''I will go up and hold the boy's hand until he goes to sleep,'' he said. ''How long is this consultation going to last?''

''Ten minutes,'' I suggested.

Brinkhorn exchanged amused glances with his wife.

''In ten minutes, when I come back, you shall have the whole mystery cleared up. Mildred's assailant shall be in the hands of justice.''

''I won't promise that,'' said I, ''but I promise that I shall know who committed the murder.''

He paused at the door.

''Don't forget the missing card,'' he said.

"That is the first mystery which shall be unraveled," said I, and the door clicked behind him.

For a second or so we looked at one another, and then the laughter died out of her eyes.

"Now, Mr. Templey?" she asked quietly.

"Are you left-handed, Mrs. Brinkhorn?" I asked.

"No. Why?" She colored slightly.

"I will tell you in a moment," said I, and putting my hand in my inside jacket pocket I took out a card and laid it on the table. "We will settle the question of the missing card straight away," I said. "I picked it up from the floor and put it in my pocket. Will you read it?"

She took it in her hand and her eyebrows rose.

"Why, this is all about me," she said.

"I think you know," I said, "that Mr. Mildred had a passion for collecting data about his cases. Let me read this to you:

> " 'Mary Mabel Tensthall. Born New Jersey 1891. Married George O. Fenton, citizen U.S.A. Detroit 1912. One son. Lived Canada. Husband killed Ypres salient, April 1915 (1st Canadians). Mary Mabel and her child on way to meet her husband, April 1915 in S.S. *Calgary*. Mined or torpedoed off the fastnets with all hands and passengers except few survivors brought to Queenstown. *Note*, they were third class.' "

Underneath was written:

"'M. M. T. booked from St. Paul (local sipping office) First-class saloon tickets.'"

"I and my boy were two of the survivors," she said.

"Read underneath, Mrs. Brinkhorn; you will see these words: 'M. M. T. booked from St. Paul (local shipping office) First-class saloon tickets.'"

"But that proves what I say. I traveled first class."

"No first-class passengers were saved," said I.

"That is a mistake," she replied quietly. "Mr. Mildred got things all wrong."

"Now I will read you a little memorandum that I took myself this evening about a man named von Goertz, who was shot in the Tower of London in the early part of 1915.

"'Von Goertz is supposed to have been working with his wife and child.'"

"Well?" asked Mrs. Brinkhorn.

"Here is another little item I jotted down from Mildred's description. It was from the body marks of von Goertz:

"'Mole right shoulder. Large orange-colored birth-mark on inside of left calf."

"Well?" said Mrs. Brinkhorn again.

"Your boy has that mark too, Mrs. Brinkhorn," I said.

There was a long silence then:

"And now," I asked, "will you please show me your right hand."

She made no movement.

"You served me tonight with your left. That is why I asked you if you were left-handed. You passed the bread with your left hand. You poured out the wine for me with your left hand. Will you please let me see your right?"

"What an absurd request!" she said, but she did not show me.

"When a Browning pistol is fired," said I, "there is an escape of gas from the chamber, which leaves a black patch on the hand between the finger and thumb. Will you show me your right hand?"

There was a silence.

"No, I will not," she said.

"Then I will tell you the rest of the story," said I. "You were in Ireland when your husband was killed. You were at Queenstown when the survivors came in. To my knowledge, they were searching for the wife of von Goertz, and it was pretty well known that Mrs. Von Goertz——"

"The Baroness von Goertz," she corrected.

"I beg your pardon," said I—"was in Ireland. You had sworn to yourself to avenge the death of your husband, and the torpedoing of

the *Calgary* gave you your opportunity. Posing as the wife of Captain Fenton, you made your way to London, sought out Brinkhorn, who fell in love with you. You married him that you might get deeper into the secrets of his Bureau. It was because he trusted you and confided in you that you know all the movements of Mildred, which were often known only to myself and your husband. It was you, and you alone, who shot him, and he recognized you just before his death and said he was glad he had not shot you."

She was as white as a sheet and sat bolt upright, her hands folded in her lap.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

It was the only question I could not answer. I had laid my watch on the table when Brinkhorn went out, and six minutes had already passed.

"You may think that I am trying to escape you," she said, "and that I am lying to save my life." There was a thrilling sincerity in her voice, and I did not doubt her. "I loved my husband. I adored him. To me he was a god. We German women have a capacity for adoration which you will never understand. You will understand less, and believe me less, when I tell you that I love Frank Brinkhorn. Will you give me until twelve o'clock tomorrow to decide?"

I nodded.

Brinkhorn came in a few minutes later.

"Well," he said jovially, "have you made your great discovery?"

I laughed.

"Mrs. Brinkhorn has been very helpful," I said, rising to go.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" he said, in mock disgust.

"Tomorrow," said I.

He looked at me sharply.

"What an officious devil you are, Templey!" said he; "and I didn't realize that you knew I had resigned from the Department."

"Resigned from the Department?" It was my turn to be surprised. "When did this happen?"

"Today," said he. "But for Mildred's death, Grace and I would be leaving for South America on Saturday. I have a ranch in the Argentine, and I want to get the bugs and cobwebs of war out of my brain."

I looked at Mrs. Brinkhorn, and there was an appeal in her eyes which I have never seen before, and I hope I shall never see again.

"Then," said I, with a gaiety which I did not feel, "I will extend your time, madam, until Saturday midnight."

. . . . . .

I do not know whether she ever told Brinkhorn. I had a wire from him last week, saying that he didn't intend returning to England, and asking me to settle his bills, and the last word in the wire was "Thanks."

I found I had to settle Mrs. Brinkhorn's bills as well, and there was one from Clarkson for spirit gum and red crêpe hair. I paid it without

batting a lid. After all, Mildred, standing on the border-line of eternity, was glad he had not killed her, and Mildred was a pal of mine, and his implied wishes were sacred. Still, I thought it was funny that I should have to pay for the Red Beard!

The Man Who Killed Himself

Preston Somerville was standing on his balcony as the train wheezed and snorted up the last stiff slope to Caux. So that he saw the man and the woman arrive. There were a pair of prismatic field-glasses on the little, round, iron table which, with a basket-chair, constituted the furniture of the balcony, and he focused them upon the station.

Yes, he was right, and, curiously enough, he had expected them that very day by that very train. They would not see him, the gaudy sun-blind above him was cover; besides, he was too far away. He watched them walking up the path, a porter carrying their two valises. Behind, walking at his leisure, was George Dixon; him he had recognized almost before he had stepped on to the platform.

Marie and the man were coming to the hotel of the Stars! They might, in decency, have gone to the Palace or the Grand, or to one of the big pensions. But Templar! He smiled. Templar had no finesse.

He looked again through the glasses.

Marie had grown stouter. He could not see the color of her hair, but doubted whether it

was still the same fluff of gold that he had known seventeen years before.

As to Templar, he had put on flesh considerably. It was over a year since he had seen him!

Somerville shrugged his shoulders and turned to survey the glory of Lac Leman, blue, purple, and eau de nil. There was snow on Grammont that had come in the night. The Dent du Midi was white down to the tree line. Two thousand feet below him was Territet, a toy-town set in a garden. A beautiful country and a wonderful world, and for him prospects of the brightest, except . . .

He walked back into his room, unlocked a bureau and took out a weather-stained grip. It was fastened with two locks, and these he opened at leisure. He put in his hand and pulled forth a leather case which also needed unlocking. There were two packages of letters, a few photographs, and something in a blue envelope. He had carried this around for years. There was absolutely no necessity for his doing so. Indeed, it amounted to a folly. It was a certificate of marriage, and recorded the fact that Preston George Somerville had married Marie Clara Legrande, and the date was seventeen years before. Why a man should carry about the evidence of his own bigamy, that criminal folly of his which, for seventeen years, had been an unceasing nightmare, he could not explain. He had married when he was eighteen, and his married life had been short but violent. His wife had left him, and then Marie Templar had come

along. He might have told her the truth, and was on the point of doing so—he put away the certificate and locked it up. He had spent the greater part of seventeen years wondering as much over the things he did not do as those he had done.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," he said, looked up, and crossed the room with outstretched hands to welcome George Dixon.

"Why, you're looking fine, Preston," said that man of law, returning the grip. "How on earth did you know I was in Switzerland? It knocked me over to get your wire."

"I read the newspapers," said Somerville, "especially the Visitors' List, and I spotted you at Interlaken."

"One item of news I've to break to you, old man," said Dixon, "and it is that I must be back in London in three days' time. That means that I must leave this paradise tonight or tomorrow."

Somerville nodded slowly.

"It couldn't be better," he said. "Sounds uncomplimentary, doesn't it? Well, it isn't really."

"And now what is the trouble?" began the lawyer. "And before you tell me anything, I suppose you know who is here?"

Somerville nodded again.

"I came up in the train with him," Dixon went on. "Is there going to be—a settlement?"

"Yes, there is going to be a settlement."

Somerville's voice was soft, and he seemed to be speaking half to himself.

"Well, if I can do anything to bring that about, Preston, I'll wait a week," said the other heartily. "Man, you've been ten times a fool to have let this thing go on. I could have stopped it for you ten years ago when you first told me, if you'd only given me the word."

"I'll stop it—myself," said Somerville, and Mr. Dixon looked at him curiously.

"How did this man Templar come into the case? You never explained it to me."

Somerville was filling his pipe, his eyes fixed upon the bluey-white mountains, and he did not reply immediately.

"There is much that I haven't told you," he said, "but Templar is the easiest thing to explain. Marie, that is my second wife, was a member of a third-class musical company which came to the wilderness where I was nursing my private grief—I think that is the expression. Templar was her manager in more senses than one. I think I was a little mad. In fact, I think I was very mad. I was keen on Marie, and that in itself was a form of lunacy. I am not going to make excuses, George, and really the excuse I offer reveals my greatest offense; but I was not sober for fourteen days when I took Marie Legrande—God knows what her real name was—to the nearest joy town, perjured myself before the necessary official, and took her for better

or for worse. She discovered the truth three months afterwards, through Templar. Personally, I think she would have let the thing go without bothering, only, unfortunately'' — he pronounced all five syllables of the word — ''Templar wasn't of the letting-go sort. It was my misfortune that I had money. That's the story: Templar and she have been running together ever since. I tell you, I don't think Marie is a bad lot. She is one of the weak, fluffy type, who loves the good things of life, and I have kept her and Templar on Easy Street ever since. I have lived through''—he shrugged his shoulders—''I am going to be melodramatic, if I am not careful'', he said, with a faint smile. ''I was content to pay and go on paying, only——''

''Only what?'' asked George.

The other got up and strolled out on to the balcony, looked around and came back before he answered.

''When my first wife ran away from me, I had been married about six months,'' he resumed in that slow, matter-of-fact tone of his. ''Seven or eight months later—in fact, a few weeks after I had married Marie—I received a note from my first wife, asking me if I could meet her. It was that note which fell into the hands of Templar, and left him in no doubt whatever as to my offense. That, however, is by the way. I met the first Mrs. Somerville, and she made me a present—the most wonderful present that any man has ever received at the

hands of a woman." His voice shook momentarily.

From his inside pocket he took a flat leather case, opened and handed it to the lawyer. George Dixon saw the smiling face of a girl, radiant and beautiful, looking out at him from the leather frame.

"Who is this?" he asked in surprise.

"My daughter."

"Your daughter?" gasped George. "But I never knew——"

"That was one of the secrets I kept," said Somerville, and took the case back.

He looked at the face for a moment, closed the cover, and replaced it in his pocket.

"That was one of the secrets I kept," he repeated, "and will explain, if nothing else does, just why I have been so complacent. I know as well as you that, if I went into court, my punishment would be purely nominal. I might even gain the respectful sympathies of a court crowded with stout ladies from Bayswater. But this" — he tapped his pocket — "how would it affect this? No, no, George, that wasn't the solution."

"But does Templar know?"

Somerville nodded.

"That is why he's coming three months before his time," he said. "He only discovered the fact a month or so ago. My little girl is at Cheltenham, and apparently she took part in some school theatricals, and earned an honorable mention in the local newspaper. The honorable

mentioner, unhappily, added the name of Preston Somerville as the father of this delightful debutante. They had a pull before they knew about Maisie. What sort of a pull have they now?"

"But there must be a solution, there must, Preston," said George. "Couldn't you send the girl to America——"

Somerville stopped him with a gesture.

"Solutions and solutions," he said; "and because I have hit upon one I telegraphed to you, providentially discovering you at Interlaken, to come along and see me. My affairs at home are in pretty straight order, but I wanted you to know about the girl, because you may have to administer my estate."

"Good God!" cried George Dixon. "You're not going to find *that* way out! Think, think, Preston! You used to be so clever at this sort of thing when we were at Oxford. Don't you remember our crime club discussion, how you used to work out the solution of all the story mysteries, and plan to the minutest detail mysteries even more mysterious than appeared in newspapers? Surely some of that old ingenuity remains?"

Somerville stopped in his restless stride and looked down at the other.

"It's curious you recall that," he said, "extremely curious. Because, as I say, I think I have found the solution to all my problems."

George sprang up, his eyes blazing.

"I knew you would, old fellow. By Gad, I'm glad!"

"Yes, I've found a solution," said the other slowly. "I've had a detective watching these two people. It was he who wired me that I might expect them here. My sleuth discovered many interesting facts, but none quite so vitally important as——" he paused.

"As?" said George Dixon impatiently.

"As the thing he carries in his right-hand waistcoat pocket," said Somerville, speaking with quiet emphasis.

"What is it?" asked the other curiously.

"That you will discover. We must leave the revelation to the very last chapter," smiled Preston Somerville. "But there it is, snug in his right-hand waistcoat pocket." He laughed softly. "I've lived through hell because of that man," he said, without raising his voice. "The woman is different. I'm certain of that. She alone would never trouble me."

He heaved a long sigh, then turned abruptly to his friend, and his tone was brisk and businesslike.

"Now, George, I'll tell you just what I want you to do, in case my scheme goes wrong. . . ."

In a large double bedroom of the Hotel of the Stars, the stout and florid Mr. Templar sat on the edge of his bed, looking at the lady who was registered in his name. She was on her knees before her open valise, unpacking with some show of reluctance.

"You told me that we'd only be here a day," she said discontentedly.

"It all depends, Marie," said the other, speaking through his cigar. "We may have to wire home for money."

Her next words confirmed Mr. Somerville's judgment.

"Why don't you leave him alone?" she asked, twisting round and sitting on her heels. She was still a passably pretty woman, though the gold of her hair did not carry conviction to the sophisticated. "Poor devil! We've bled him enough, and we've got enough too, Joe; why not let's go back home and see that farm you're always talking about?"

Mr. Templar chuckled. There was little of the desperado in his appearance, for he was mild, thin-haired, and readily amused. His face was pink, his bulging eyes unlined. He took life very easily.

"If I had listened to you," he said good-humoredly, "you'd have had twenty weeks' engagements a year at about four pounds per. I should have been managing dirty little third-rate companies in dirty little fourth-rate towns. Here you are in a beautiful country, living on the fat of the land at the best hotels, and you're grousing. You haven't had a bad time for years; not a real bad time."

She had resumed her unpacking.

"It depends on what you call a bad time," she said. "I've had my bad times, don't you worry! And you've had yours too, Joe." She

swung round. "There's been times when you've thought that Preston was going for you. Do you remember that night in Paris when you saw him with the fellow from Scotland Yard, walking through the café?"

He blinked and swallowed.

"Shut up," he said uneasily. "Prison—phew! I'll never do that! I have lived like a gentleman, and I think I can die like a gentleman," and his hand strayed to his right-hand waistcoat pocket. "There's something in that farm idea, dear," he said after a while. "I've always said so too. Let's try him this once, and then we'll chuck it."

She, on her knees, laughed bitterly.

"If you've said that once, you've said it forty times; anyway, I'm not going to see him."

"Did I ask you to?" demanded Mr. Templar in an aggrieved tone.

It was not till the next morning that he met his victim. They were alone on the broad stoep of the hotel, looking down over Territet. Templar made his usual gambit.

"Well, Mr. Somerville, I am sorry to trouble you again, but things have been going pretty badly."

"They'll go worse for you," interrupted Somerville, with unexpected malignity. "I shall live to see you some cold, misty morning hauling stones from the Dartmoor quarries. I've promised myself the pleasure of a trip to Princetown with this object."

Templar was speechless. This was not the

man he had known, the cynical, quiet gentleman with the hard smile, who had paid without question, and had offered him no other offense than his contempt.

"I—I——" he spluttered. "What do you mean? Suppose it is you who go there?" He raised his voice. "Suppose I send you there and bring . . . your daughter to see you! That makes you sit up, old man? Suppose I bring her down . . . to see you? That's a different tale, isn't it?"

A faint flush had come to Somerville's lean cheeks, but his provocation had served its purpose. Templar's loud voice had brought an inquisitive waiter to the verandah, who lingered a moment, eyeing them interestedly, until the fact that his presence was not required was made obvious, and he retired.

"How much do you want this time?" asked Somerville in a quieter voice.

"Three thousand," said Templar, made bold by anger. "That is, seventy-five thousand francs Swiss."

Somerville walked to the balustrade of the stoep and leant on his folded arms, looking down to the lake. In Templar's eyes he was a crushed and beaten man. That final argument about the daughter had been sufficient, said Templar to Templar, and exulting in the new weapon he planned other raids, conveniently forgetting the attractions of farm life which panic had conjured.

Presently the other man looked round.

"Meet me tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock, in the Gorge du Chauderon."

"Gorge du Chauderon?" said Templar, puzzled. "Where's that?"

"You walk down the hill to Glion, turn to your right through the town, and you'll strike a road which leads eventually to Les Avants. Near the bridge which crosses the gorge, you will find a path which runs down to the river-bed. It's a nice, quiet place, where we are not likely to be interrupted."

"Why not here?" asked the stout man. "I can come to your room tonight——"

"You'll get your blood-money in the Gorge or nowhere," said the other decisively. "What's the matter with you, Templar? As a rule, you don't care for your 'allowance' to be transferred in a room, where the transaction might be witnessed by a hidden detective; that was the excuse you made in London for taking me out in the middle of the night to the Embankment."

"There are plenty of places we can meet," growled Templar, "besides——"

"That's the place I have decided upon," said Somerville.

Templar was eyeing him suspiciously.

"There's going to be no monkey tricks, you know, Preston Somerville!" he blustered. "If you try . . . I'll have no mercy on you!"

Somerville snapped his fingers contemptuously, and turned away.

"At three o'clock," he said.

"I'll be there," between his teeth; "and if you attempt any——"

Somerville did not wait. He walked leisurely along the stoep, turned in through the lounge, and made his way to the manager's office. Templar followed. He had his doubts and his own fears. He took a chair where he could watch the entrance to the bureau, and as the time passed and Somerville did not make a reappearance, he began to fidget. Twenty minutes had gone when his prey came out, talking in low tones to the manager, and Templar thought that the manager looked across at him with a certain significance. He felt hot, wiped his neck with his handkerchief, and rose to his feet with a self-conscious cough, and stalked back to his room with the self-conscious carriage of one wholly disinterested in Somerville's existence.

Disjointedly and with unusual heat he retailed the particulars of his meeting to the silent woman. He was badly rattled; was impelled three times to the bottle of whisky he kept in his trunk, and rendered all the more irritable by her unresponsive attitude.

"Well, say something," he snapped at last. "What's he after? What's his game? He never treated me like that before. Is he short of money?"

She looked him straight in the face.

"Joe," she said, "do you want my advice?"

"If it's the kind of advice I want," he said, biting savagely at the end of his cigar.

"Well, you'll leave Caux at once," she said. "I don't know much about Preston—I didn't live long enough with him to discover all his little ways. But he's cleverer than ten devils if he's put to it. And it's not like him to lose his temper."

She sat a moment with pursed lips, then rose jerkily.

"I'm going," she said.

"You're going! Where are you going? You're not going anywhere," he said sharply, and she swung round on him.

"Don't try any of that rough stuff with me, Joe," she said. "I'm going back to Paris by the night train. You can stay and get what you like, but I'm through with this. The Lord didn't give me the equipment of a blackmailer, and I don't think He gave it to you either," she said. "I know what has put you up in the air; his talk about Dartmoor!"

Mr. Templar testified to the shrewdness of her guess with that nervous little blink of his.

"Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea if you went," he said, after a while. "Anyway, there's no need for you to stay. But, by thunder, if he tries any of his funny business with me . . .!" He drew a deep breath.

He saw her off that night by the last train down the mountain, a greatly relieved woman; their farewells were unemotional. Then he went back to his room and slept, and his sleep was interrupted by bad dreams.

In the morning a further happening disturbed

him not a little. He had taken his breakfast in his room, and had spent an hour reading the newspapers on the stoep. On his return to his room he found that the valet had unpacked and had brushed and hung his clothes; but, what was more disturbing, had taken from the bottom of his valise the somewhat theatrical revolver which Templar carried with him, and had laid it on the dressing-table. It was an excellent weapon, despite its silver plating and mother-of-pearl butt.

"Who told you to unpack my grip?" demanded Templar angrily.

The astonished valet raised his shoulders to the level of his ears and smiled.

"I thought monsieur desired. It is usual," he said.

"I gave strict orders that my bag was not to be touched! I told you myself!" roared Templar. "I'll complain to the manager and have you fired, damn you!"

What could a well-meaning valet do but raise his shoulders again to the level of his ears and smile even more despairingly before he melted from the aggrieved presence.

Templar took up the revolver and examined it. He would want that, at any rate. If this fellow tried any monkey tricks (Templar's vocabulary was a limited one), he would show him! He searched in his bag, took out a little packet of cartridges, loaded the weapon, and slipped it in his hip pocket. The weight of it gave him no little comfort. The sense of its possession

added to the sum of his confidence, and he needed all the confidence he could muster. There was something sinister and menacing in the name of that place, Gorge du Chauderon, which made him shiver, though he was to find the journey thereto prosaic enough. He went down to the Glion by train, and walked along the hill road cut in the steep slope of the gorge. He found the little path without difficulty, and slid and slipped down through a wilderness of larch and pine to the rocky valley bottom. He stopped to rest now and again, for he had plenty of time. There was no sign of Somerville. He half expected to find him a fellow-traveler along this tortuous descent. But Somerville had gone ahead, and was sitting on a rock in a small clearing, in sight of the furious stream which leapt and dashed on its impetuous journey to the lake.

Somerville sat waiting in this drowsy spot, where the ceaseless "shish-shish" of the mountain river drowned the ceaseless shrill of crickets. From where he sat he could see the naked peak of Jarman and the scarred shoulder of Rocher de Naye. He heard the hesitating footsteps of his enemy and rose to his feet.

Templar stopped dead on seeing him, all his suspicions and fears revived.

"Come along, man, what are you afraid of?" called Somerville, and the man advanced with hesitant footsteps. He peered from left to right, seeking the witness he always suspected was lurking somewhere within hearing; but the thin

vegetation hereabouts offered no cover, and he came closer.

"Sit down on that rock, Templar," said Somerville. "Let's talk."

"I don't want any talking," bullied the man. "I haven't come here for conversation—I've come——"

"But I have," said Somerville. "I'm going to tell you something."

The man's eyes narrowed.

"I'm going to tell you this," resumed Somerville. "You're at the end of your tether, my friend."

"Oh, so that's it?" Again he looked round. "You think you've caught me, do you?"

"I have not only caught you," said Somerville evenly, "but I am going to kill you."

Templar leapt up, and in his hand glittered and flashed the weapon he had jerked from his pocket.

"Oh, you are, are you?" he breathed. "Well, if it comes to killing, Somerville—I guess two can play at that game. You try any of your monkey tricks . . ." He paused, at a loss for breath, and Somerville laughed quietly.

"Keep your gun," he mocked. "I hoped you would bring it. I repeat I am going to kill you," he went on. "For a very long time, nearly seventeen years, you have lain on my life like a horrible dream. You thought it was because I feared for myself that I shrank from the disgrace which would attach to my name. You now know,

having made the discovery recently, that I was afraid for—some one else."

"Your daughter. I know all about that," interrupted Templar, who had regained something of his nerve.

"I only want you to realize just how I have suffered," said Somerville, "so that, if a tardy sense of justice is awakened in you before you die, you may have the comforting reflection that you deserved all that came to you."

He walked slowly towards the other, and Templar leveled his pistol.

"Don't come any nearer," he said hoarsely. "I'll shoot you like a dog—by God I will!"

"Shoot!"

The contempt in the tone might have stung another man to desperate action, but Templar cowered.

"Shoot! You fool, whatever you do, you're doomed! Shoot! You haven't the guts . . . your hand is shaking . . . ah!"

Somerville, drawing nearer and nearer to the wabbling barrel, suddenly launched himself at the man. One hand gripped the revolver and wrenched it from Templar's grip, dropping it on the grass at his feet. The struggle which followed was short. Preston Somerville, lean and lithe, was all muscle and nerve—his opponent started the fight at this unfair advantage, that he was wholly demoralized.

For a second or two they swayed, Templar squirming and clawing, and then he fell, grazing his cheek against the rough face of a boulder.

Somerville stooped, turning him over, and noted the lacerated cheek with a lift of eyebrows.

"Excellent," he said steadily. "Most excellent! If I had designed that scratched face of yours, Templar, I could not have executed the deed more neatly—get up!

He had picked up the revolver and slipped it into his pocket.

Templar rose shakily.

"You'll suffer for this," he said in jerks.

"On the contrary, you will suffer—that is why you are here."

A look of fear, blind, hysterical fear showed in the prominent eyes, and Somerville smiled.

"I'm not going to kill you—here," he said. "As a matter of fact, in a few minutes you will be climbing that path again. I intend that you shall spend the rest of your years in a Swiss prison, Templar—one of those mountain prisons where men go through life seeing nothing but gray peaks and white peaks until they die. Doing nothing but digging and quarrying until somebody digs——"

"Shut up!"

Templar's voice was a squeak.

"You can't do it! See! You try . . . you try!"

Somerville nodded.

"I am going to do it."

He took the man's revolver from his pocket and laid it on the rock beside him. Then he produced a thick pad of banknotes. Templar saw they were each for a thousand francs. His next proceeding was more difficult to under-

stand. With a small pen-knife he made a little incision in his wrist. It was no more than a scratch, and the blood bubbled slowly to view. He waited a second, then lifted his revolver.

"Come here!" he said sharply.

Slowly the man obeyed.

"Lay your finger-tip on that cut," he commanded.

"What's the game?"

"Do as I tell you."

The reluctant Templar obeyed.

"Now take that note—the top one."

"Look here——!" But the revolver barrel drove forward into the pit of his stomach, and Templar clutched the note with his bloody fingers.

"Give it to me," said Somerville, taking the money and examining it. "An excellent impression. The chain is complete."

Templar was breaking quickly.

"What's the game, hey?" he fretted. "What's the idea of all this fooling? You're not going to scare me, Somerville, take it from me! I've seen too much of play-acting——"

"The chain is complete!" Somerville's voice was harsh and joyous. "Listen! Here are the links. First you quarrel with me this morning in the presence of a waiter—that it happened to be I that started the quarrel is immaterial. Next I inform the hotel manager that you are a bad character who has demanded money from me."

Templar's face was purple.

"Next," said Somerville, "I instruct the

valet—he attends me also—to open your bag in order that he may identify your revolver. He could never forget having seen the elegant weapon. Next I meet you alone here in the Gorge du Chauderon—and next?"

The truth was dawning on Templar—the hideous trap into which he had fallen. He could only blink and swallow and swallow and blink.

"Next," said Somerville slowly, "I am found dead here—your revolver near by; your blood-stained finger-print on a banknote . . . the marks of a struggle on your face——"

"No, no!" Templar screamed the words. "You'd never do it, Mr. Somerville! For God's sake—you'd never do it . . . suicide . . .!"

The torrent of his speech ran into a delta of sheer incoherence.

"Suicide," said Somerville. "I've planned it all—step by step. You've given me seventeen years to plan it, you dog . . . and you're going down with me. They'll find my body here—I wrote to the police at Les Planches to tell them I was meeting you and asking for protection. The letter will be delivered this afternoon—I even worked out the time."

He lifted the wad of banknotes and held them out.

"Take these," he said. "Take them all save the one which must be found by my side——"

With a howl Templar struck at the extended hand, and the grass was strewn with the scattered notes.

Then he turned and fled up the path, sobbing like a frightened child. He must reach the road —find a man—a witness, and return to the place before . . . before . . . He must have a witness—somebody who had seen Somerville alive. . . .

Half-way up the path he was stricken motionless.

"Crack!"

The hills echoed and re-echoed at the pistol shot. He turned open-mouthed, ashen, toward the sound. He was paralyzed, could only mouth incomprehensible noises of woe. He could descend and recover the note. Face that? With a wail he turned and fled up the side of the hill, stumbling out into the roadway almost under the wheels of an empty fiacre.

The driver looked at the dishevelled figure wonderingly. As for Templar, he could only outstare the coachman, who had pulled his horse to a halt.

What suspicion was in this peasant's mind? Templar pulled himself together with a superhuman effort, and pushed back the hair from his streaming forehead.

"Glion—Gare!" he muttered, and stumbled into the victoria.

He would get down to Territet, he thought. The funicular left every ten minutes. After Territet? There was the lake or the rail. He could get to Italy—seven hours' run, but he'd have to wait until the morning for a train. Or to Lausanne, or—— That was the scheme! By boat

to Evian! Evian was in France, and an hour's journey across the lake.

He took courage at the thought.

He paid the cocher, and the man looked at him curiously.

"M'sieu has injured himself? See, there is blood on M'sieu's fingers."

Templar remembered and cursed. He offered no explanation, walked straight to the ticket office, and secured his billet. The car waited, and he fumed. Why were they waiting? The answer came when the sky-blue train from Montreux clanked into the station. Two men got out, and Templar bit his lip to stop the cry which he could arrest in no other way. They were Swiss gendarmes. Of course! The police office was at Les Planches, half-way between Montreux and Glion. He would like to have crouched down in the high pew-like compartment out of sight, but he braced himself to sit stock still.

The policeman spoke to the *chef de gare,* then walked briskly from the station and turned on to the road. A bell tinkled, and Templar could have wept his relief as his car dropped slowly on its steep run to Territet.

He had a quarter of an hour to wait for a boat to Lausanne. No steamer ran direct to the French ports from this end of the lake, and at Ouchy he discovered that the last boat for Evian had already gone.

It was getting late now, so he went up to Lausanne and snatched a hasty meal. The way out was by rail. Valorbe was only a few miles,

and he discovered that a mixed train ran to Pontarlier at eleven o'clock—and Pontarlier was France. He took his ticket and went into a gloomy waiting-room, and, choosing the gloomiest corner, sat down to wait.

He spoke and understood French, and all that evening in the café and in the crowds which flocked the *quais* of Lausanne Station he had listened intently for some word of the crime—his crime! The one crime of all crimes which he had not committed and was incapable of committing.

But he had heard no word. . . . The Swiss police kept these things quiet.

Prison . . . years and years . . . all his life . . . they did not execute for murder in Switzerland.

He shook his head violently.

"No . . . no prison for me."

From outside the waiting-room a man watched him through the window. It was rather difficult to see Templar, because he had chosen his corner well, but the watcher identified him and walked back along the platform to the entrance, where two policemen were standing.

"The man is in the waiting-room," he said in French, "in the corner nearest the clock. Do not forget his name is Templar."

"You accuse him of having stolen your bag?" said one of the policemen.

The man nodded, and the policeman moved off. Templar heard the door open, and sat bolt upright at the sight of the uniforms.

"M'sieu Templar?" said one of the policemen.

Templar nodded.

"I arrest you——"

Templar had taken the little phial from his right-hand waistcoat pocket, and had swallowed its contents at a gulp.

"Prison . . .? No prison for me . . ." he said thickly. "Blackmail, yes . . . but not murder . . . not——"

They caught him as he fell, and one went to look for the man who had charged him.

But Somerville had disappeared from the tragedy he had staged.

An hour later he was speeding back to Montreux in a fast motor-launch. On the way he dropped overboard the silver-plated revolver which he had fired into the air that afternoon.

It was a bad day for the man Templar, when an inquisitive detective had discovered that he was in the habit of carrying cyanide in his right-hand waistcoat pocket.